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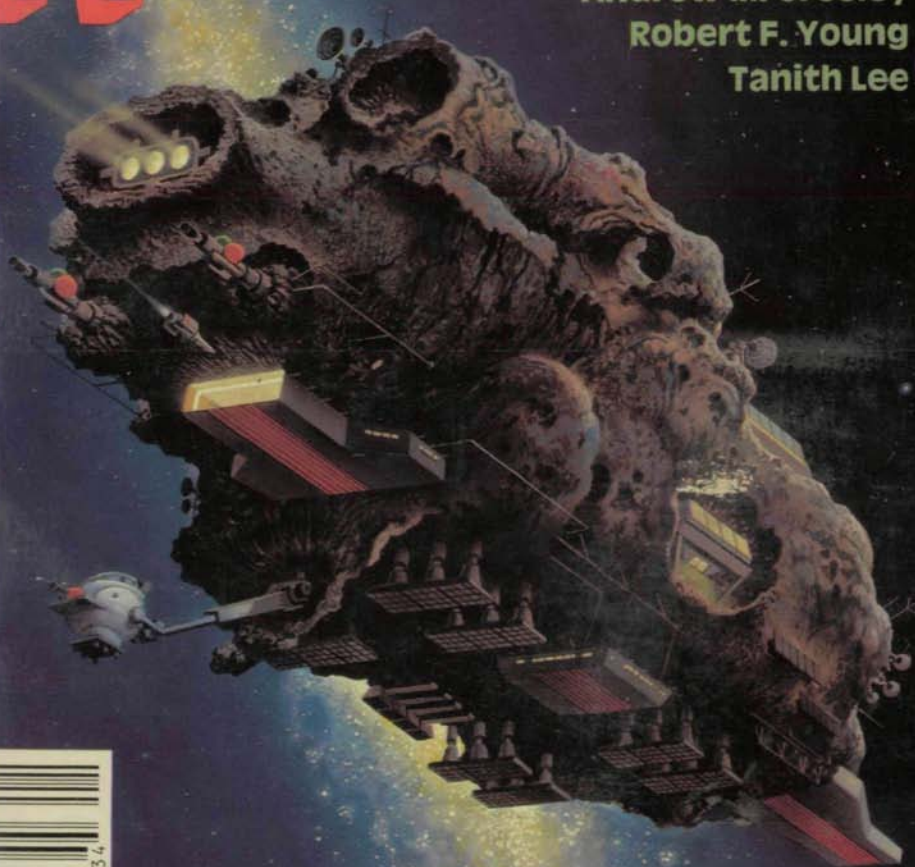
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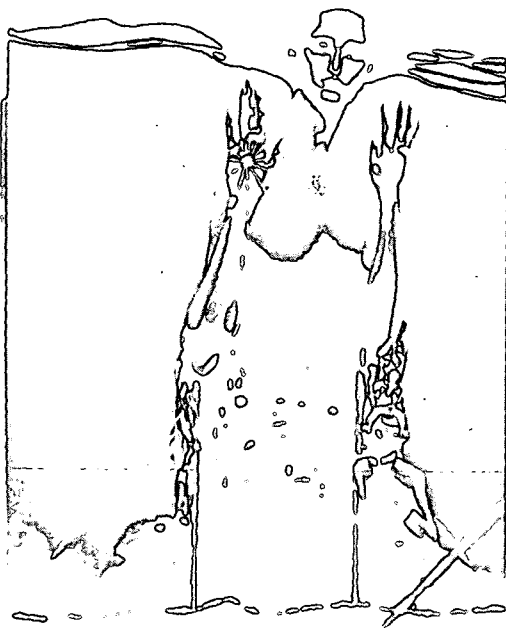
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# AMAZING®

JANUARY 1985

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## DEPARTMENTS

- 4 Robert Silverberg: Opinion
- 9 Robert Coulson & Frank Catalano: Book Reviews
- 20 The Readers: Discussions
- 58 Baird Searles: Screen Reviews
- 115 George H. Scithers: The Observatory

## FICTION

- 26 Andrew M. Greeley: Gaby
- 62 Rand B. Lee: On Springfield Mountain
- 96 Tanith Lee: After the Guillotine
- 110 Robert E. Howard: Buccaneer Treasure
- 116 Robert F. Young: Mars Child
- 135 Gene Wolfe: Two Poems
- 137 Sharon N. Farber: MS. Found in a Cruet Set
- 142 Diana L. Paxson: The Servant of Saibel
- 153 Tina Rath: The Lady Who Rode the Central Line

COVER: Alex Schomburg

POETRY: Beverly Grant, p19; John Devin, p25;  
Susan Palwick, p92; Wendy McElroy, p109  
John M. Ford, p162

CARTOON, CARTOON: William Rotsler &  
Alexis Gillsland, p7

# Opinion

by Robert Silverberg

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The deadly menace of acid rain — precipitation tinged with vegetation-killing oxides of sulfur and nitrogen — is the target of a bill now working its way through Congress. Acid rain, which is swiftly ruining forests and lakes across much of the northern hemisphere, seems primarily to be caused by the release of pollutants through the burning of coal in power plants. The proposed legislation would curb acid rain primarily by compelling public utilities in 31 eastern and mid-western states to reduce the quantity of sulfur dioxide that they emit in the course of power generation from 22 million tons a year to about 12 million tons. This can be done in either of two ways: by installing scrubbing devices on the smokestacks of their power plants, or by cutting back on the use of coal with a high sulfur content.

One can hardly disagree with the intentions of this bill. There is mounting evidence of the horrors caused by acid rain, horrors that can only multiply over the years ahead. But what about the costs of this legislation? As Mr. Heinlein sagely observed some years back, there ain't no such thing as a free lunch. Environmental cleanups have a way of exacting a price, somewhere along the line.

In this case, shifting to low-sulfur coal would put thousands of coal miners out of work in already depressed Appalachia, where most of our present high-sulfur coal supply comes from. Installing scrubbing devices would involve costs of billions

of dollars that ultimately would have to be paid for by the consumers of electricity, requiring increases in electrical rates that would range, over the next five years, from 18 percent in Illinois to 36 percent in Ohio. But even after that, we'd have no assurance that the problem will have been satisfactorily dealt with. Burning coal to generate power is a dirty business at best. It is altogether conceivable that within a decade the acid-rain problem will be so acute that environmentalists will be calling for a total ban on coal-burning power plants.

It is not likely, though, to be accompanied by a total ban on the use of electricity. But where is the power going to be coming from, if coal is *verboden*?

We used to burn a lot of oil and natural gas to keep the boilers hot in our power plants. That began to stop in 1973 when the first OPEC oil shock made us understand that we could not go on consuming those precious hydrocarbons as if they were infinitely available. Our domestic oil supply, despite the current glut, is just about gone; natural gas will last a little longer, but not much. At a cost of billions of dollars the power companies converted their plants away from oil and gas to reduce our national dependence on imported energy sources. (They converted them to — coal.)

It hardly makes sense to convert all those plants back to oil and deliver ourselves again into OPEC's hands, or to return to natural gas when our



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remaining supply is probably good for no more than another few decades. But the demand for electrical power is great, and growing at three or four percent a year nationally. Those shiny new computers and television sets and stereos around the house don't run on batteries, after all.

What other sources of electricity are there? Well, there's hydroelectric generation — but our available hydro sources are pretty well developed already. Solar power? It has its appeal, but its range is limited: it works fine for suburban houses in sun-belt states, but it doesn't seem really practical just yet for supplying power in any quantity to large northern cities. Burning of garbage and other exotic fuels? Again, a small-scale solution. Atomic fusion? The technology isn't in place yet, and won't be for at least twenty years. Beaming power down from L5 satellites? Ditto.

Of course, there's nuclear power. . . .

We get something like 13% of our electricity from nuclear power plants right now, from 76 nuclear plants. (In Europe the figure is 25%. In Japan, which has no fossil fuels of its own, it's even higher.) Without those reactors in service, we'd either be dumping much greater quantities of coal-caused pollution into the air or we'd be buying hundreds of billions of dollars more of OPEC oil. Nuclear power plants are clean. They do virtually no environmental damage. No filthy coal-heaps, no belching smoke stacks. (The dams by which "clean" hydroelectric energy is created cause immense back-ups of silt that eventually choke the rivers they harness.) They cost less to operate than fossil-fuel plants. (Or they used to, before government regulations strangled them.) And they are safe. There have been no meltdowns, no explosions, no significant releases of

radiation from any nuclear power plant, not even during the notorious Three Mile Island accident. At Three Mile Island, there was much fear of radiation release, but not much really did get loose. Coal-burning, by the way, actually does release a certain amount of radioactivity. And mining coal kills people. On the day of the Three Mile Island event — which caused zero fatalities — half a dozen coal miners were killed in a mine accident in the same state. In the general hysteria their fates were overlooked; but they are dead nevertheless, sacrificed to our need for electricity.

Other nations, mindful of the acid-rain problems and their own shortages of oil, gas, coal, or hydro sites, are building nuclear power plants as fast as they can. Japan alone has 8 coming on line between here and 1990. Western Europe will have 181 nuclear power plants in operation by then. Russia plans to complete 4 or 5 thousand-megawatt reactors a year over the next five years.

Not here. In the United States the last new order for a nuclear plant was placed in 1978. The ones under construction now are reaching completion years late, because of court challenges and retroactive changes in government regulation; and their costs have been grotesquely inflated, causing havoc for their owners and increases in power costs for their customers. Even when a plant is completed there's no assurance it will go into service; at this very time a four-billion-dollar job is sitting idle on Long Island, ready to go but kept dormant by political crossfighting.

Fear is the reason why the United States, where nuclear technology originated, is the only nation in the world that has turned away from this energy source. We are literally scared silly of it. We worry about release of

radiation from the plants, we worry about China Syndrome meltdowns, we worry about where to store the spent radioactive fuel. Meanwhile the rest of the world is moving swiftly ahead of us in power generation, finding ways of building cheap, efficient, standardized, *safe* nuclear power plants. (Including one in eastern Canada that is intended solely to sell electricity to the New England states, where the

Seabrook and Millstone atomic power plants remain tangled in problems while demand for power grows.) And meanwhile we burn coal to make our electricity, and the acid rain falls impartially upon the living and the dead.

The social, economic, and psychological implications of all this, I think, are worth considering carefully. More on the topic next time. ✂

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**William Rotsler**

## CARTOON



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# Book Reviews

by Robert Coulson

## **Job: A Comedy of Justice**

by Robert A. Heinlein

Del Rey, \$16.95 (hardcover)

Since my involvement in science fiction is due to the fact that I read "The Green Hills of Earth" in the *Saturday Evening Post* and immediately went looking for more stories like it, I still tend to regard Heinlein's early stories as the epitome of what good science fiction should be. (And I was perhaps more dismayed than most by some of his books of a few years back.) This one is somewhere in the middle of his range. The title describes it; it involves the testing of a mortal intended for sainthood, and is frankly fantasy rather than science fiction. I'm sure the author's treatment of God and Heaven will outrage many of his general readers, as I assume he intended it to do. (One point to remember: Heinlein hasn't been writing for the readers of *Amazing* for a good many years. One doesn't get a hardcover printing of 150,000 by catering exclusively to SF fans.) I was amused by the bureaucratic Heaven, though a few other humorous touches didn't seem to be as funny as they were intended to be. The middle of the book drags a bit; even the protagonist remarks that anything constant eventually becomes boring, and persecution is no exception. Basically, the persecution consists of translating the protagonist and heroine into alternate worlds; nothing but their clothing goes with them, and as soon as they find a way to improve their lot, they're shifted again.

The weakest part of the writing, as usual, is the sex scenes. Their matter-of-fact treatment underscores the idea that sex is a natural function, but the descriptions quickly become even more boring than the persecution, and lead to the assumption that they're in there solely because general readers expect sex in their best-sellers these days.

Still, the background of Alex's home world, in which our Moral Majority would be considered slightly licentious, is excellent; Alex himself is an interesting character; and most of the people he runs across in his travels are equally well drawn. The assorted alternate worlds aren't often described in any detail, but what's there is good. It's not a great book, but it's mostly an entertaining one.

## **The Bones of Zora**

by L. Sprague

Catherine Crook de Camp

Phantasia Press, \$17.00 (hardcover)

An amusing trek through the pre-industrial societies of Krishna, by the tour guide Fergus Reith and the social scientist Alicia Dyckman, who have appeared separately in previous de Camp books. Since Alicia is basically spoiled, they encounter assorted problems with assorted non-human cultures; this is primarily a novel about culture-shock, with the human characters being in the same position as the Europeans who toured the oriental kingdoms in the 18th century.

Reith's wimpish attitude toward Alicia is believable if infuriating; the



rest of the cast, plot, and background are good. It's not the best book in the Krishnan series, but it's entertaining and well worth your time. I also liked the dust jacket by Victoria Poyser, though my preference is for the blue-haired Krishnan musician rather than the beautiful Alicia.

### **Birds of Prey**

by David Drake

Baen Enterprises, \$14.95 (hardcover), \$7.95 (trade paperback), distributed by Simon & Schuster

A marvelous novel of alien invasion and time travel in the 3rd-century Roman Empire. The protagonist is an Imperial intelligence agent who is assigned as guide and bodyguard to a well-connected citizen on a mysterious mission. Gradually, Perennius learns (the reader, who has been expecting it, is generally ahead of him) that his charge is not only not a citizen, but by Roman standards not even human, and the mission is far more vital than he could have dreamed. The plot is more or less logical; the unexplained can be passed off with references to a time travel process that even the traveler doesn't understand. The Roman background has the ring of absolute authenticity, the characters are excellent, and the growing affection between the coldly efficient Roman agent and the unemotional android time traveler is depicted brilliantly. There are also touches of humor throughout the book, my favorite being a comment on Germanic humor:

"That, Perennius thought, was the measure of the disaster which had struck the pirates. A cripple was being burned alive, and not one of the Germans around him was laughing."

(For any Germans who resent this, my wife's grandparents came from Germany; and she not only thought it

was funny, but agreed with it.) This is the best fiction of the column.

### **The Night of the Ripper**

by Robert Bloch

Doubleday, \$14.95 (hardcover)

This is a historical detective story rather than a fantasy, but Jack the Ripper seems to intrigue most fantasy readers — and he certainly intrigues Bloch. In this novel, the protagonist and the solution to the Ripper's identity are fictional; but the background is authentic; and all of the actual suspects, from the Duke of Clarence through assorted doctors, "foreigners," midwives, and so on, are detailed. It's interesting and I enjoyed it; I might have enjoyed a straight non-fiction account more, but Bloch does well with the mood and aura of the era and area, and those are probably better evoked in a novel.

### **The Prisoner of Blackwood Castle**

by Ron Goulart

Avon, \$2.50 (paperback)

Something to try when you want really light reading. It will probably be more appreciated by readers (like me) who have encountered *The Prisoner of Zenda*, *The Mad King*, and/or George Barr McCutcheon's innumerable books about Graustark. Goulart gives us a tiny European kingdom just before the turn of the century, a beautiful princess, a heroic American detective, a villain named Dark Otto (boo, hiss), and a mad clockmaker who produces clockwork automatons which can successfully impersonate any of the above. From then on, it's typical Goulart and an enjoyable lightweight parody.

### **Mute Evidence**

by Daniel Kagan and Ian Summers

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mutilation scare of a few years ago. It's also a story that fiction editors would reject as unbelievable, and the best book in this column. Ignore the sensational cover blurbs. Kagan and Summers are reporters who investigated the affair in depth, not only interviewing the people involved but also questioning medical/veterinary experts, looking up background information, and above all, using their intelligence. Their conclusion, not surprisingly, is an indictment of the tendency of the media to sensationalize perfectly ordinary events, because sensationalism is what attracts readers, listeners, and/or viewers. (This isn't just the well-known sensational papers, but small-town newspapers, radio stations, and TV stations.) I keep running across people, even in fandom, who don't understand the differences among facts, theories, and interpretations. This in-depth survey of the birth and growth of a nonsensical "story" could open a few eyes — but probably won't. (The authors don't cover the story to its death because that sort of thing never dies; years from now, occultists will be quoting it as proof of their theories.) It's a fascinating study of people and their reactions to events they perceive as unnatural, and it's highly recommended.

### **The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha**

#### **Vol. 1: Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments**

Edited by James H. Charlesworth  
Doubleday, \$35.00 (hardcover)

Probably not many readers will want to buy this one, but would-be fantasy authors should nag their libraries into getting a copy. Being very scholarly translations of various pseudo-Biblical texts, together with critical notes, it's not exactly fast reading; but if you're

looking for ideas and background material for fantasy, this is the place to look. It's mostly prophecies and visions: falling stars copulating with cattle, constellations in combat (there's a lovely space-opera title right there), angels with faces like leopards, and so on. Makes one wonder what the authors had been ingesting before writing.

### **The Peace War**

by Vernor Vinge  
Bluejay, \$15.95 (hardcover)

A company working on defense contracts develops a force field, and, for the very best of reasons, withholds it from the military and uses it to enforce world peace — under the jurisdiction of the company management, of course. Years later, an underground movement has formed; and seekers of peace are opposed by seekers of freedom. The science here is from Arthur Leo Zagat and James Blish; and the hero, whipping up a new invention just in the nick of time, would feel at home in a George O. Smith novel. But it's enjoyable enough as an adventure; the characters are interesting and if the plot *is* contrived, it does move well.

### **The Dune Encyclopedia**

compiled by Dr. Willis E. McNelly  
Berkley, \$9.95 (trade paperback)

It's certainly encyclopedic; I opened it at random and was facing an article on Fremmen menstruation. All the characters, places, and history of the Dune universe are covered, plus articles on finance, calendars, industry, and so on. It tells me more about Dune than I want to know, but it should be enjoyed by Herbert fans.

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by H. Beam Piper  
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Piper's third, "lost" Fuzzy book has been discovered. It's an interesting enough book, and certainly reads like authentic Piper, though like all sequels it lacks the impact of the original. Nice Whelan cover. Recommended.

### **Dragonsongs**

by Joanne Forman  
Performing Arts Press,  
P.O. Box 3181, Taos, NM 87571  
\$8.00 (60 min. cassette)

This isn't a song tape; it's a narrative with musical interludes. The singer, Kathleen Kingslight, is quite good; narration seems adequate. (I dislike narration; therefore I'm not a good judge of it.) Together, they recapitulate the story of Anne McCaffrey's books *Dragonsong* and *Dragonsinger*, and I expect that a lot of McCaffrey fans will want copies, even if it bored me.

### **Bill Maraschiello's Magnetic Elixir**

Starwind Enterprises, Inc.,  
222 Andalus Drive,  
Gahanna, OH 43230  
\$6.50 (46 min. cassette)

Maraschiello is a fan who is also a professional entertainer; this first tape is primarily folk material and about half excellent instrumentals, on an assortment of instruments. The fantasies included are the instrumental "March of the Clan Graeme," "The Jedi Knight's Blue Yodel," with its atrocious final pun, and the folksong of shape-changing, "The Two Magicians." There's also the most complete version of "Mandalay" that I've heard sung (even if it was folk-processed a bit). Not a folksong tape, but people who enjoy folksongs should like it.

## **by Frank Catalano**

This column marks my second anniversary as a book review columnist, along with Buck (more formally known as Robert S.) Coulson. Reviewing is an unusual occupation for a writer, at least for my money. It's a symbiotic relationship with those who write and publish the books: they produce them; I review them, giving the writer and publisher publicity, and me an income from reviewing. Whether a good or bad review actually has any effect on a book's sales is open to debate; but there are those who believe that in a field glutted with first novels and new talent, any mention is better than sinking into the La Brea Tar Pits of writing obscurity.

(And for those of you who think "symbiotic" should read "parasitic," I may agree — unless the reviewer has been or is currently a writer of fiction

him/herself. I am.)

But reviewing regularly brings with it problems. Charles N. Brown, the publisher and editor of the SF trade publication *Locus*, warned me about it when I was six months into this column. Simply put, after a while you start feeling as if you're running out of adjectives.

Oh, sure; there are a lot of modifiers out there, probably several thousand in English alone. Problem is, not all are fit for reviewing ("... and the author's first novel is a storkbilled read?"). And any good editor, such as our very own George Scithers, would tell a beginning writer to cross out carefully all adjectives and then re-add them only as needed. A reviewer can't do that. Adjectives are the hemoglobin in our literary criticism bloodstreams — we need them to get the opinion across,



which is, after all, why we're writing this stuff in the first place.

So with the serious-minded approach I usually reserve for watching reruns of *Lost in Space*, I decided to grapple with the issue in my own columns.

For the sake of brevity I attacked only the columns published in the 1984 issues of *Amazing*, all six of them, looking for the five worst modifying offenders in the order of frequency. The results surprised even me.

All of them, at least, proved to be positive modifiers, putting an end to any speculation that I simply tear down books. Starting with the runners-up, **fine** showed up as a modifier to only five nouns, less than I expected. **Solid** stood its ground eight times, as did **convincing**. And one which is likely to be used when a novel is well-plotted, **complex**, made appearances nine times (on the other hand, the less complicated **complicated** showed up merely once).

The winners: as the fifth most frequent modifier, the positive-but-not-overly-enthusiastic **nice** came in with 10 appearances. Number four went to the ever-popular **entertaining**, 15 times up; and it's what I like in a novel, anyway. The bronze was taken by **very**, an all-purpose modifier, 22 times. The silver, by **well** (as in -drawn, -maintained, -done, -worth, -written, -constructed, -crafted — you get the idea) which welled up 30 times.

May I have the envelope, please.

Used more than any other modifier, an average of 7.6 times in each column, or once every 283 words is my good friend, **good**. Good grief.

And just think. This column starts a whole new year. Gentlemen, start your adjectives.

### **Bearing an Hourglass**

by Piers Anthony

Del Rey, \$13.95 (cloth)

Back a few months ago I reviewed the first volume in Anthony's series, *INCARNATIONS OF IMMORTALITY*, a novel I preferred greatly to just about everything else I've read of his because it appeared to have some meat to it. Unfortunately, as is so often the case in series, the second novel isn't up to the level of innovation and delight of the first.

Like *On A Pale Horse*, the book *Bearing an Hourglass* is set on a future Earth where magic and science work side by side; and the concepts of time, death, war, fate, and nature are actually offices held by people who fulfill each office's functions. The first novel dealt with Death; this one deals with Time and its new officeholder.

But I can't get as excited about *Bearing an Hourglass* as I did about the first novel. Part of the enjoyment of the first was in seeing how the office *worked* — that is, the trappings and limitations Death had to work with and within. Trappings and limitations abound in the second novel, mostly in the form of a magical snake ring and the hourglass that gives Time his power.

It was the hourglass that did me in. You see, Time lives backwards in time as we see him. But the convoluted explanations as to how this works and how he avoids paradoxes — well, my willing suspension of disbelief collapsed somewhere around the second explanation attempt. Since the rest of the novel's plot pivots on the gimmick, it just fell flat, though there were some nice touches here and there.

I also had a hard time believing in the lead character who becomes Time. Simply put, this guy's a nerd. A nice nerd, but nerdy nonetheless. Many of the novel's characters and some of its scenes could have fallen right out of a

comic book. Not bad if that's supposed to be the tone of the work, but my impression is that Anthony has loftier ideals for this one.

Some readers less demanding of internal consistency may enjoy this; me, I'm waiting for the next three books that complete the series.

### **West of Eden**

by Harry Harrison  
Bantam, \$15.95 (cloth)

Harry Harrison is perhaps best known these days for his tongue-in-cheek books about the interstellar crook, the Stainless Steel Rat. But Harrison has a serious side as well. Note the novel *Make Room, Make Room*. The latest novel to come from his typewriter is *West of Eden*; and it, too, fits on the serious shelf.

Imagine: the dinosaurs never died out. Instead, the cold-blooded creatures evolved into intelligent beings, living in cities made of genetically-engineered plants and using genetically-engineered creatures to do some of their work. The only thing keeping these saurians from happiness is the fact some of their cities are dying because of increasingly colder winters. Their solution? Colonize North America, which is unknown to them, and build a city in what we know as Florida.

What scaly-face doesn't know is that the Tanu — what we call human — exist already in North America, in travelling hunter caravans and agricultural communities. And they aren't about to give up their land.

Neat idea, huh? I thought so, and noted that Harrison really did his homework on biology, geology, and the like (and which are detailed in several appendices). The homework is obvious as you read; and while it's not intrusive, it seems sort of deliberate — that

is, the story really never appears to take off and soar on its own because so much background has to be laid out. Perhaps it's because of this that the final method of attack used by the Tanu against the lizards didn't come as a great surprise to me.

One thing that is intrusive is that the all-seeing, all-knowing narrative by the author occasionally slips in ways that make you aware someone is stacking the deck (things like the author referring to the reptiles as "disgusting lizards" rather than leaving that characterization strictly to the characters). And the obvious set-up for a sequel.

Enough. *West of Eden* is close, but just doesn't hit the mark when it comes to a really good alternate-Earth novel. The thought is there; but without spontaneity, the thought doesn't turn into action.

### **Jitterbug**

by Mike McQuay  
Bantam, \$3.50 (paper)

Now if you want to pick up a book with the passion that *West of Eden* could use, pick up Mike McQuay's latest. *Jitterbug* is a high-energy, preposterous-yet-believable tale of a future Earth ruled by Saudi Arabia. Well, not Saudi Arabia exactly.

The novel is set nearly two hundred years in the future. 150 years before the novel takes place, an Arab leader decides he wants to restructure the world into an Arab state. His tools are innocuous-seeming oil-company domes placed in every major city. Inside the domes, though, is a bug — the Jitterbug — a highly communicable virus that attacks and destroys the central nervous system and leads unfailingly to death, accompanied by the twitches giving it its nickname.

By 2155, a good chunk of the world is either uninhabited or uninhabitable



Elizabeth Williamson

*Thank you for saving my life.*

Not long ago, Elizabeth Williamson needed 11 units of blood during surgery for a perforated ulcer. And if it weren't for someone like you donating blood through Red Cross, she might not be here today.

The need for blood never ends. The demand is continuous. And there is no substitute. A healthy person can donate blood several times a year.

Make sure enough blood will be there if you, a loved one, or anyone in your community ever needs it.

Call Red Cross for a blood donor appointment. And bring a friend. Thanks.

# Donate Blood.

American  
Red Cross



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thanks to both intentional and accidental opening of the Jitterbug domes. The Arabian ruler keeps track of his charges through the Light of the World Corporation — government run as a business. The story begins as someone who lives outside of one of the walled LOW-run cities kills a LOW executive being transferred to the regional HQ in New Orleans. The outsider takes his place, only to wind up in the center of a kaleidoscope of problems involving the dictator, his brother, a Jitterbug-driven army, corporate politics, and the possible end of human life in what remains of North America.

The novel has its rough spots, but the sheer inventiveness of its plot, the depth of its background, the believability of its characters, and the deftness of its pacing are fascinating. McQuay has taken what, on the surface, seems like an implausible situation and turned it into a taut, exciting read.

### **Sleepless Nights in the Procrustean Bed**

by Harlan Ellison;

edited by Marty Clark

The Borgo Press, \$14.95 (cloth), \$7.95 (trade)

A lot has been said about the fiction of Harlan Ellison: its passion, its punch, and the points it makes. But aside from two books of essays on television, about the only place you could find Ellison's essays in book form was among the short fiction in his previous collection *Stalking the Nightmare* or in the wild, irreverent introductions to his books. I'm generally not a fan of introductions; but Ellison's dive, soar, and play at your mind the way a good story does. And they are never dull.

Neither is *Sleepless Nights in the Procrustean Bed*. Longtime Ellison

secretary/corporate officer Clark has chosen a sample of 20 essays that appeared in various places from 1965 to 1982 and arranged them in three categories: Harlan and Television, the World of SF, and Profiles. Choosing the "best" out of this collection is a matter of personal taste — there's everything from his reasons for resigning from the Science Fiction Writers of America, through his first and only video-game review, to a profile of the late Steve McQueen.

Sometimes the subject matter overlaps and repeats itself; other times it may be a bit dated. But Clark has included some explanatory notes to provide missing background and time factors. There's even a lengthy index.

It may not be fiction, but Ellison's essays are some of the most powerful writing around, no matter how you categorize them.

### **Star Trek III**

by Vonda N. McIntyre

Pocket, \$2.95 (paper)

V

by A.C. Crispin

Pinnacle, \$2.95 (paper)

Almost nothing I can say about these books (or any film/TV tie-in, for that matter) is likely to keep them from selling well. But if you've steered away from both just because they are tie-ins, be assured neither falls into the reprehensible category of novelizations I call "creative typing." That, I think, can be credited to the previous experience of McIntyre in SF and Crispin in horror writing.

**Star Trek III**, for example, follows the film closely for all but the first 80 pages. In those pages, McIntyre provides the material needed for depth — material not in the movie, covering the time between when **Star Trek II** ended and this film begins.

The novelization of both mini-series (not the new TV series) appears in Crispin's version of *V*, and she does a good job of getting out of the horrendous, incomprehensible cop-out the writers of the last segment of the mini-series resorted to when the cross-breed little girl saved the day. (If you didn't see it and don't know what I'm refer-

ring to, count yourself fortunate.) Crispin makes it palatable. I only detected one real problem — events leading to one situation that appears in the TV show **don't** appear in the book. But that's a small point, though it would be nice to think that it was just an oversight on the part of the printer.

✂



## DRAGONS AND DUDGEONS

Would a dragon eat a lady (be she maid or be she not)?  
Would he gobble her for breakfast, lunch, or tea,  
Unadorned by herbs and spices, mead or brandy (just a tot)?  
Would a barbecue or simple fricassee  
Suit a beast of such distinguished pedigree?  
I somehow doubt it.

And why, I ask, a maiden with her slim and tiny form  
Unenhanced by juicy marblings of fat?  
You'd think a knight or lordling would come closer to the norm  
Of a dragon's dietary needs than that.  
Better yet, a bureaucrat —  
No doubt about it!

So don't come to me with scary tales of damsels sacrificed  
To sate that noble creature's appetite.  
Though there may have been an era when that sort of threat sufficed,  
If you want me to give in to you, Sir Knight,  
Better come up with a line a bit less trite.

— Beverly Grant

Dragons and Dudgeons 19



# Discussions

## by the Readers

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Dear George Scithers,

Some weeks ago I sent you a long letter on what I'd like to see in *Amazing*® and you sent a return request to figure out why some lines of my letter had "funny spacing" in them. This seems to be due to a defect in the WordStar® word processor that I have. When the printer is in the unjustified mode (to leave the right margin unjustified) with microjustification (spacing between the individual letters) turned off and is printing backwards, then (on some lines) the microjustification seems to get turned back on. I have found that I can correct this by explicitly turning off the microjustification in the file to be printed (by typing ".uj0" as a control character command).

This is not something that is easy for the untrained eye to see — I had to stare at the lines you pointed out for some time before I recognized the problem. It took my husband (who has helped write some word processors) to figure out what was going on and how to correct the problem. Perhaps all the problems you are seeing are due to similar effects in the microjustification of various word processors. If my explanation is confusing, you might just include a copy of this letter for people with the problem — they should look up "microjustification" in their word processor manuals and set it explicitly.

Sincerely,

DeAnn Iwan  
Albuquerque NM

We are grateful for the explanation:

**WRITERS TAKE NOTE!** We are having to take note of new technology as more and more writers use word processors — which are all right as long as the writer is firmly in charge. We do not know who needs justified right margins, extra line spaces between all paragraphs, and no five-space indentation for the latter. Editors and typesetters emphatically do not. We do not know who is happy to read dot-matrix printing all day: the worst kind is a crime against eyesight and even the best is not very kind. The sad fact is that quality costs.

(None of the above was a reproach to you, DeAnn. Your printer turns out perfectly legible text.)

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

I'd like to add my thoughts to the current discussions of your magazine's circulation problems and the difficulty of the new writer's breaking into print.

First of all, I agree with those who say that increased newsstand and bookstore magazine-rack distribution will bring in more readers (and, inevitably, more subscribers). However, we've also got to examine why more people aren't buying the magazine out there already. Content is not the problem. The story quality of *Amazing*® is as high as any SF magazine's, particularly since you've had the good taste to buy some of my stories (a joke, George). I believe that the problem may lie in part with the magazine's

visual impact. An anecdote seems in order here.

I first saw *Amazing*® on a newsstand, and I nearly passed it by for a number of reasons. First, the name evoked for me the days of pulp SF, which I snobbishly equated with an era of largely lousy writing now considered "golden" chiefly because its major perpetrators are getting on (and one always considers one's youth golden). Second, the cover illustration seemed more cartoon than serious art, and I took my SF very, very seriously. Third, the names "TSR, Inc." and "DUNGEONS & DRAGONS"™ appeared prominently within, and I felt that the magazine was likely slanted to a teenage readership of little literary discernment (which goes to show how much I had to learn about "D & D" aficionados, teenagers, and you, George).

I left the store without buying the issue. Later, prompted by curiosity, I returned, bought it, read it, liked it, and resolved to sell a story to it someday. Nonetheless, I think that my aesthetic snobbery is not atypical of men and women in my age and economic group.

If I were to redesign *Amazing*®, I would change the logo from its present sweeping comic-book style to something more restrained (but still capable of being highly colored if necessary to catch the eye). I would arrange the contributing writers' names in a block on the cover (rather than in separated pairs); this gives the comforting impression that the buyer is getting a lot of story for her money. I would title Silverberg's "Opinion" columns and put his name and that month's column title somewhere on the cover (perhaps in a banner near the top of the magazine). I would ensure that the cover illustrations be as little suggestive of comic-book art as possible.

This is what I would do, because I think a more sophisticated look might attract an older, more urbane, more moneyed readership, and hence more subscriptions.

Finally, a word about breaking into SF print. I'm a beginner. I've written and sold only seven SF stories in my life. I have a dozen or more incomplete in my file; three or four finished but unsellable. In the three years I've been trying to write seriously, I've learned:

- 1) Never compare yourself to other, more established writers. Asimovian fecundity aside, most have had to swear and curse just as long as you have to break into print.

- 2) Be as original as possible. You have no "name" or reputation to catch a magazine buyer's eye or editor's interest, but a richly imaginative story will ensure the editor's recalling your name next time around.

- 3) Never rework a story on one editor's suggestion until you've submitted it to *all* the appropriate paying markets (unless of course that editor has promised to buy it if you rewrite page 1). I sold a story to *Amazing*® that Asimov's wouldn't take, and one to Asimov's that *Amazing*® didn't like. Editors have different tastes. (I haven't been able to sell *anything* to *F&SF*!)

- 4) Never throw anything away. My most recent sale was a reworking of an idea from a tale I aborted two years ago.

[Another letter.]

Wanted to congratulate all & sundry for Gerald Pearce's story in the September issue, "In the Sumerian Marshes." It was not extraordinary for its treatment of telepathy; it was extraordinary in its lucid language, fascinating use of foreign setting, and characterization. It deserves anthologi-

zation and use as a Pointed Example of the importance of plain good writing to good SF. SF writers seem to fall into two camps: the Ideators and the Wordcrafters. When the twain meet, magic results. When they don't, I'll side with the Wordcrafters every time. I'd much rather read a beautifully worded story on an old theme than a startling idea expressed in a wooden, two-dimensional manner.

The idea is vital to SF, of course; I must agree with Silverberg's September "Opinion" column, which laments the proliferation of Doomsday-elves-and-Conans. My suspicion is that all three obsessions arise from the same condition: the horrifying suspicion in people's minds that we are the last generation. The natural response to despair is to run madly toward it and embrace it (thus the Doomsday novel), or run the other way completely and escape into a world of pure fantasy (the Elf problem). If Necessity is the mother of Invention, Hope is the father. Hope is in short supply these days, and the lack of it freezes the creative blood.

Best,  
Rand B. Lee  
Key West FL

*Amazing®*, as it was the first, is now the last of the titles in the old style. Startling, Astonishing, Thrilling Wonder are gone; Astounding became Analog. But we don't quite think we want to become Digital™: there is such a thing as tradition. We inherited a logo harking back to the days of Gernsback; we looked at some new designs but found none convincingly better. Cover art must be catchy in the root sense of the word; we think ours is striking without being blatant.

We'd rather catch our readers young, when they're just getting interested in

SF; show them what real SF is like, and then keep them for a very long time. Gift subscriptions apart, it's one buyer, one copy.

We quite agree with your comments on writing.

— George H. Scithers

Dear Mr. Scithers,

You may have noticed that I sent you three stories last month, which is in violation of my self-proclaimed quota of no more than one per month. Well . . . I wouldn't want you to think I am a weak-willed backslider. So I want to explain. . . .

You see, when I first found myself writing SF stories, it was all so unexpected and it seemed so out of control — of course I was upset and scared. But now I've decided that writing SF stories really doesn't hurt a person. Just because it's out of control doesn't mean it's anything like a drug or alcohol problem.

I think it's more like being pregnant. That is, when you find yourself writing SF stories, it's *too late* to talk about self-control or quotas or abstinence. About all you can really do is grin and ride it out and see what happens.

Sincerely,  
Carol Deppe  
Corvallis OR

Gentlebeings,

Robert Silverberg's "Opinion" (Sept. 1984) was, I'm sure, meant to be serious — but it made me laugh all the same. He bemoans the lack of new ideas in SF, and gives two examples of "new" ideas which SF writers should have originated.

Sorry, Silverberg, but your "new" ideas are ancient.

*Ragnarok: The Age of Fire and Gravel*, written in 1883 (yes, over a hundred years ago) by Ignatius Don-

nely, tells of the evidence that a comet striking the Earth wiped out a previous civilization (including details about a copper coin brought to the surface during the boring of a well — found eighty feet deep in glacial clay, it had evidently passed through a rolling mill and been intricately engraved with acid). Atlantians of the time supported the concept that a group of comets having a highly eccentric orbit passes close to Earth at regular intervals and collisions and near-collisions have destroyed a succession of civilizations and life-forms.

The Bomb as God? I received a very nice rejection slip from *Analog* in the late sixties for a story titled (if I remember correctly) “The Newest Testament” which stated God had chosen The Bomb as His incarnation for the Second Coming since the First was received so ambivalently. John Campbell said it didn’t work because people won’t automatically worship power; they have to believe the power can and *will* be used. We don’t believe that about The Bomb, even though it has been used. (**Pop Quiz:** A variety of leaders from Hitler to Idi Amin all had atomic weapons of one sort or another — but which country was the only one to ever use one in warfare?)

I agree that new ideas are difficult to find — and the “Opinion” unintentionally shows just how scarce they are.

Incidentally, the next letter off this typer is going to Orson Scott Card, recommending “Next Year in Brigadoon” for a Nebula. Need I say anything more about the zine you’re putting out?

Best wishes,  
J. Michael Matuszewicz  
Columbus NE

*The difference between the “Neme-*

*sis” cometary collision theory and Ignatius Donnelly is that the former is scientific. Donnelly was the von Däniken of his day. That his imaginings have anything to do with apparent scientific reality must be dismissed as a coincidence. For more details, see de Camp’s “The Great Pseudomath” in The Ragged Edge of Science.*

*As for the pop quiz — let us not forget the circumstances. The fanatical last-ditch resistance of the Japanese, most lately on Okinawa where thousands of civilians went to their deaths, had shown what could be expected. Deaths in the millions. How ready were the Japanese to surrender in that first week of August? Truman’s choice has forever kept us from knowing.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear George,

I thoroughly enjoy *Amazing*®, which is why I’m a subscriber. That and the fact that the local newsstand only stocks four copies. I clipped the subscription coupon in September ’83 and promptly sent it in, which brings up my first suggestion. Couldn’t Kristine finagle the boards so that the coupon backs something other than a story? Perhaps one of the ads or, better still, the change-of-address coupon. (I wouldn’t object to it backing any of the line drawings, but I know *that* would draw wails from other quarters.) You see, I save my copies and frequently reread stories; there is nothing more frustrating than to discover part of a story has been sent back to the magazine.

I agree with Keith Ballantine: justify those columns. Personally, I find a ragged right margin on solid body copy distracting and downright ugly. I wouldn’t go so far as to say justified columns are more “professional,” but they certainly are more inviting and

cause less eye strain.

Sincerely,  
J. D. Fairbanks  
Elgin IL

*To those few vexed by the coupon — g'wan, it's no more work to write or type on a piece of paper your name and address (as you must do anyway) and the words, "Enter my subscription to Amazing® for two years. My check for \$16 is enclosed." Address envelope, insert check, stamp, mail. What could be simpler? (Well, yes. . . .)*

*For compelling reasons of layout the coupon is where it is. We are taking the matter of justified columns under advisement.*

— George H. Scithers

Dear Sirs,

I am writing to request a two-year subscription to your magazine. You will find a check enclosed for \$16.00. I would also like to take advantage of your offer of the booklet "Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy" free with a new subscription. I look forward to receiving it.

I have been reading science fiction since 1965 when I was bumped off a flight out of J.F.K. and had to spend the night attempting to sleep in the airport lounge being lulled by the hum of electric floor polishers. I gave up the attempt when the penetrating odor of ammonia was added to the equation by a crew of men armed with mops. Luckily, the book shop was still open and, after rejecting a vast array of books that seemed all to have been written by Harold Robbins, I selected a book called *Dune* by Frank Herbert.

I almost missed the next flight out because I couldn't hear the announcement, or much of anything else that was occurring in the real world. I did make it back to school, through no

fault of my own; but the die had been cast. From that day on I have been an inveterate reader of science fiction.

About a year ago, a writer friend of mine and I were talking about the genre and, though she does not read "that sort of thing," she pointed out that I obviously wanted to write it. She had some harsh words about people who didn't try. She was right. Anyway, I started in with the wonderful innocence of the inexperienced and discovered it was definitely not easy. Unfortunately, it was addictive.

I await your booklet eagerly because the main reason I have yet to submit anything is ignorance of the proper forms. Having worked in an unrelated field for a number of years that has its own rules for judging a professional offering from an amateur one, and having many times had to reject things for poor presentation, I hated to make that kind of error. Logic can only go so far towards figuring out the right way to do something. It's nice to have someone to ask.

I just wanted to let you know that I appreciated your efforts in this area as well as your excellent publication.

Sincerely,  
Dorian Nisinson  
New York NY

*Thank you: you are doing the smart thing, and not only in sending us money. Since we do not like to pre-judge stories, we do not reject for faulty presentation, though we issue some stern warnings. If a machine, viz., a better printer with a dark ribbon, can do the retyping, we do often enough ask for better copies in the correct format. But it has seemed too cruel not to let a writer know the intrinsic flaws of a story. We might just sample the very worst texts.*

*We are grateful for all the thoughtful*



comments and criticism we get, and even more grateful when they are cleanly typed and doublespaced (as yours was). Matters of a business nature are best sent to the office of publication (P.O. Box 110, Lake Geneva WI 53147-0110), and letters would be read by the staff there before being forwarded along with the manuscripts. Otherwise, you may cut transit

time by sending stories to us at P.O. Box 8243, Philadelphia PA 19101-8243 — but this is for our current readers only: make sure, by having a fresh issue, that it is up to date, and do not include it in any guide or directory. Let's just put it this way: we do not intend to be the last editor of *Amazing*®.

— George H. Scithers

3<

## THE CAVE OF SHADOWS

Crashing here, what fate remained?  
Animal species grown in caves  
Turn blind, become afraid of day.  
Weather determines so many things  
On this planet, lobotomized by clouds.

Our tent, shorn from its moorings, crackled  
Like explosions in the wind.  
The blue glow of the type-A star  
Swirled its blue shadow out of lightning  
And the racing visage of the wind.

It held our lander hostage — a power sink  
In a sparking, cross-wired circuit —  
Till someone held a corner of the tent.  
It tugged like a fish in the mad current;  
Pulled from the dark and the mind a thought.

With kites we reeled the power down,  
Capacitized the overflow,  
Wired ourselves a sun, and seasons,  
Learned to minesweep holes to heaven  
For the lander's homeward flight.

We still return, like strangers, to  
The planet called *The Cave of Shadows*,  
But with a knowledge of perfect forms  
Long ago revealed to reason  
In the light of earthly days.

— John Devin



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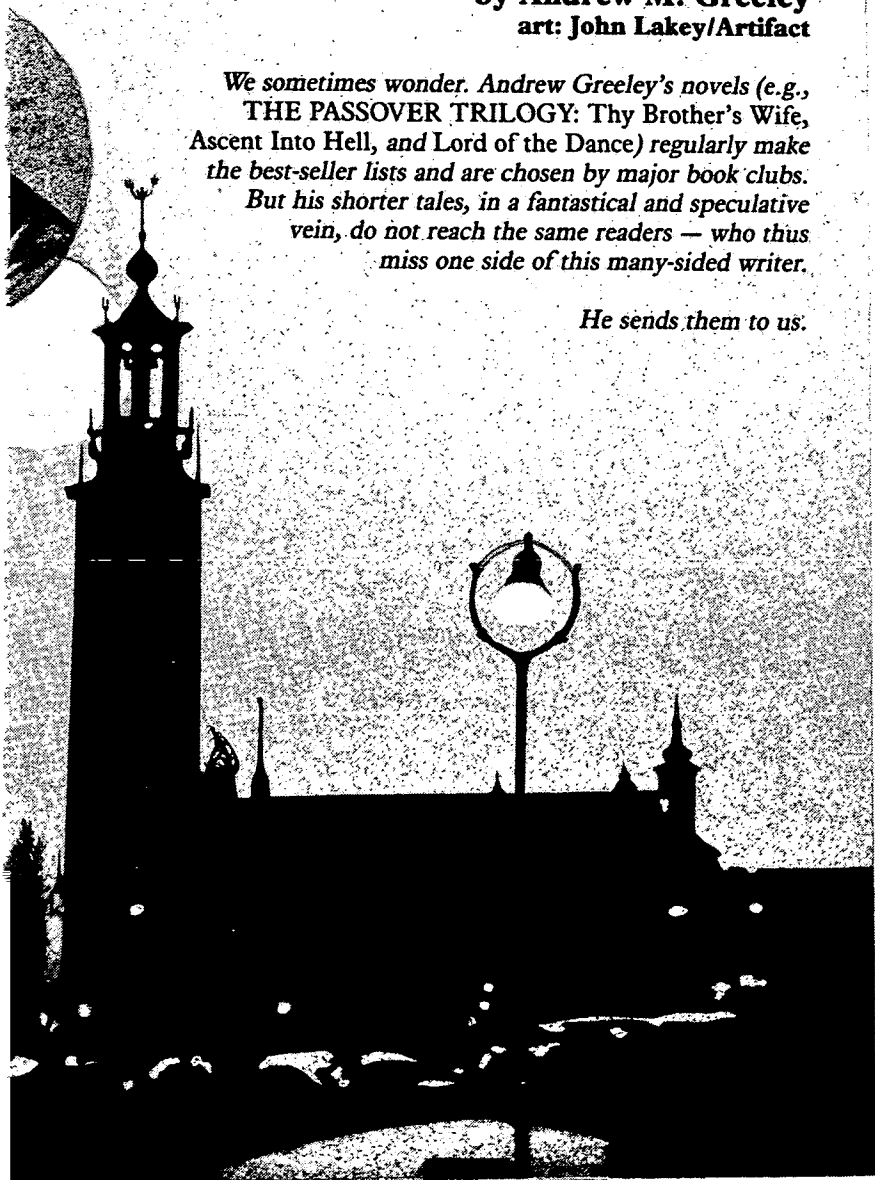
## GABY

by Andrew M. Greeley

art: John Lakey/Artifact

*We sometimes wonder. Andrew Greeley's novels (e.g., THE PASSOVER TRILOGY: Thy Brother's Wife, Ascent Into Hell, and Lord of the Dance) regularly make the best-seller lists and are chosen by major book clubs. But his shorter tales, in a fantastical and speculative vein, do not reach the same readers — who thus miss one side of this many-sided writer.*

*He sends them to us.*



"There must be many places in the cosmos . . . where evolution for various reasons has made more headway than here on earth, many places where it has by now pressed its efforts beyond generating life, consciousness and knowledge to new heights, enlarging the realm of subjectivity by annexing regions of which we are still ignorant . . . these creatures would be equipped with brains which would help their owners to a much larger share of that mind which has just now begun to shed some light, though as yet a relatively faint one, on our own heads . . . we ourselves may have descendants as genetically distant from us as we are from *homo habilis* . . . we might constitute a bridge to nonbiological descendants of an entirely different sort . . ."

— Hoimar v. Ditfurth

*Outside the open window  
The morning air is all awash with angels.*

— Richard Wilbur

"**I**t might be useful," said the rich womanly voice, "to model me as your guardian angel."

"I gave up guardian angels," said Professor S.S. Desmond, standing on the elegant queen-size bed of his room in the Helmsley Palace Hotel so that he could search for a hidden speaker behind the expensively framed print which hung over his bed, "after Sister Intemerata's class in grammar school."

"There are no speakers," the disembodied voice said casually, "though there is a microphone hidden in the television. I wouldn't worry about it. They can't hear me . . . and it was shabby of you and your friends to eat garlic at lunchtime to torment Sister Intemerata's sensitive nose."

Sean Seamus Desmond gave up on the print and bounced to a sitting position on his bed. *That was pretty clever.* Not many people knew of the Great Garlic Caper. He thought about examining the TV and decided against it.

"You called your guardian angel Josephine, as I remember. Josie for short."

"God damn it, how did you know that?" he exploded.

*I must have told someone. My sister?*

There was a knock at the door. "Room service," said a muffled voice.

"Don't let them in," said the invisible woman urgently.

"Go to Hell . . ." Desmond told her. "I'm hungry," and to the door, "Come in, it's open."

Two men who pushed the door open did not have a room service cart with them. Nor did they look like waiters. Rather they seemed to be longshore-

men or perhaps merchant seamen. They wore dark pea coats, collars turned up, black trousers, and black ski masks pulled down over their faces.

And they had ridiculously tiny guns in their hands with absurdly long silencers.

*I am going to be "hit,"* Sean Desmond told himself in stunned astonishment. He noted with abstract interest that his misspent life did not race before his eyes as they pointed the guns at him.

*Twenty-two's, he thought, Mafia specials. My last thought . . .*

Colored lights twinkled, briefly, in front of him, like a high-school science-class animated film — the kind he had on occasion denounced as misleading.

The forehead of one of the longshoremen seemed to explode. A large red spot appeared on the chest of the other, then spread as blood gushed out of his pea coat and cascaded down to the soft green carpet. Both men fell to the floor as though their legs had been knocked out from under them.

"Wonder-Woman trick," said the womanly voice ruefully.

As Sean Desmond watched incredulously the two men decomposed before his eyes — flesh, muscles, blood, bones vanished in almost instantaneous putrefaction. Without the smell. Then the blood from their wounds disappeared from the rug as if someone had cleaned it with an incredibly powerful solvent, one that did not damage the rug fibers.

He realized that he was going to be very sick. He rushed to the sumptuous bathroom and barely made it in time. His United Airlines first-class lunch was quickly ejected as was most of his breakfast. His empty stomach, not understanding that there was nothing left to give, continued to react violently.

*The one luxury trip I'm likely to have in my whole life,* he thought, reveling in self-pity, *and I get mixed up with ghosts and gorillas.*

He was conscious of a cool reassurance touching his forehead and a sympathetic embrace consoling him, as his mother did when he was a very sick little boy.

"It'll be all right, Jackie Jim," the voice said tenderly. "Only next time, please do what I tell you."

He had not been Jackie Jim since he was five. Thirty-eight years ago. When he graduated from college and gave up his Catholicism but decided to compensate by becoming even more Irish, he had changed his name from John J. Desmond to Sean S. Desmond, almost to Sean S. O'Desmond. He decided against that because there was an upper limit to how much you could twit the biological fraternity and still expect to win a Nobel prize. As it was, his incorrigible Irish wit had delayed the prize for several years.

The Royal Swedish Academy did not have much of a sense of humor. Well, his research on evolutionary "punctuation" finally forced the damn Swedes to give him the prize regardless.

And he'd get even with them in his acceptance speech.

At first he was too sick to challenge the womanly presence which had enveloped him. Then, as his stomach decided that it too could go along, on an ad hoc basis, with her ministrations, he began to feel better.

He staggered out of the bedroom and collapsed into a chair. Across the street the massive gray transept of St. Patrick's testified that he was still in the real world.

"I need a drink," he said shakily.

"Give it a few minutes," she spoke again.

"Who the Hell are you?" His hand rested on the phone to summon room service but he was not quite ready to ignore her suggestions.

"We exist in a cosmos of unfathomable enigmas and mysteries," she replied, a touch of amusement in her sensual voice. "But it does seem likely that humankind is at a crossroads, at an ontological turning point. We may well have come to another 'punctuation' in the human evolutionary process. There is no reason to think that such times of great leaps forward are limited to the bacteria on which I have done my research. It may be a matter of hundreds of thousands or even millions of years, a relatively short time in the evolutionary dynamics which began with the big bang. . . ."

"That's my acceptance speech," he said, beginning to feel a little frightened, "which no one else has read . . . how could you . . . ?"

She chose to ignore his question. "A little pompous, but it will certainly stir them up. They'll think a long time before they give the prize to another Irishman. And, yes, you're the only one to have read it, but you talked to too many people about it. That's why your late friends wanted to kill you. . . ."

"Why would anyone want to kill me because I engage in outlandish speculations about the direction of evolution? The monists are not into political assassinations, are they?"

He was talking, quite casually now, with a woman who lacked a body but seemed to be able to save his life. An uncanny feeling crept through his body, as if he was in a haunted house.

He often told his students that he rather doubted there was a God but was quite sure there was a Devil.

"That," she said, "is what we want to know."

"And who are you?"

"We are the kind of beings whom you rather pugnaciously imagine in your Nobel acceptance speech — the products of a different evolutionary process which happens to be in a more mature state of development."

"You're not!" he insisted flatly, slipping back into his mother's brogue.

"We are," she laughed lightly. "Your satirical dreams turn out to be true."

Her accent was mostly Midwestern urban like his own, but not perfect. Occasionally there were intonations which were a little bit off key. As though she'd learned his accent quickly.

"I won't talk any further unless you let me see you," he said stubbornly.

"Your own arguments say that the energy patterns of our organisms



might be so simple and yet so complex as to be imperceptible to minds still limited by the primitive energy patterns of the early stages of the human evolutionary process."

She was enjoying herself enormously.

"I still want to see you."

Lights flickered and blinked in front of him, like an enormous and graceful multicolored CRT screen. Intense, highly focused, and extremely elaborate energy patterns.

And patterns which, for all their attractiveness, were like nothing which Sean Desmond had ever seen before or ever imagined.

"Dazzling and lovely," he said, with an edge on his voice, "but I can't talk to a terminal screen."

The patterns changed colors, whirled feverishly, and then seemed to condense into the shape of a woman, sitting calmly on the green and gilt chair at the other side of the window. Her smile was as amused as her voice.

St. Paddy's was still across the street.

Sean Desmond reached out to touch her arm. It felt quite solid, and the beige cashmere sweater she was wearing was smooth and soft.

"You didn't think I would transmit electromagnetic waves, as you would call them, for your eyes without also transmitting for your sense of touch, did you? . . . I can even produce parts of the spectrum you can't see or touch. How about some heat?"

Her arm became as hot as a blazing fireplace. He pulled his hand back quickly.

"I wasn't planning on being fresh," he said, his humor returning.

"But you like my appearance?" she asked, smiling with just a touch of what in his species would be considered vanity.

Hell yes. She was just the kind of woman that Sean Desmond admired the most. Silver hair, smooth girlish face, full voluptuous figure, neatly encased in sweater and skirt, smooth skin, flawless facial bones, elegant and slender legs, soft brown eyes with long lashes — somewhere between thirty-five and forty-five — youth and maturity combined in a perfect blend.

Too perfect, like a manikin.

"You'll do," he said.

"I'm glad," she said, still greatly amused. "If I must travel with you to Stockholm and back to protect you, I would not want to be an eyesore."

"Travel with me?"

"Surely: I am your assistant. I will always be in an adjoining room." She nodded in the direction of an open door — which Desmond was sure had not existed a half hour before. "Don't worry, you won't have to pay for me. And I'll be charming and intelligent, a credit to your importance and prestige."

"To protect me from whom?"

She frowned, an empress asked a question she did not want to answer.

"The point is, Sean — you don't mind me calling you by your first name,



do you? — not from whom but why. We know who they are but we do not understand why. We cannot read your minds. We are rather good at guessing, but your brain patterns elude us.”

“As we cannot read the minds of chimps?”

She drummed her slender fingers on the ivory-colored handle of her chair. “I did not say that. You are not an inferior species, merely one at a different state in your evolutionary process than we are in our process.”

*She thinks I'm inferior, though. A likeable chimp.*

“All right,” he sighed the way his grandmother sighed. “Since you are going to call me ‘Sean,’ I’d better have a name for you.”

“I can be called ‘Gabriella,’ ” — she colored faintly — “ ‘Gaby’ if you wish.”

The a in “Gaby” was pure Minneapolis. But when she said “Gabriella” the name sounded Italian. Her accent was still not perfect.

Sean relaxed. Thank goodness, he was more flexible than most academics. He could adjust to a lovely extraterrestrial with minor strain. Even chat easily with her.

“No relation to the fella in the New Testament, are you?” — he dialed room service and prepared to ask her what she wanted to drink — “Gabriel I mean?” He laughed lightly.

She was not amused. “I would remind you, Professor Desmond,” she said grimly, “that Saint Luke was a male.”

Sean Desmond hung up the phone before room service answered. With considerable difficulty he overcame his impulse to make the sign of the cross as his grandmother had done.

To ward off banshees, leprechauns, pookas, and redmen.

And other dubious spirits.

“**D**id you folks really sing at Bethlehem?” Sean asked, more in fun than in earnest.

They were eating in the rose and silver Trianon room of the old Villard House onto which the Helmsley had been grafted. It was Sanford White at his most baroque.

Gaby, dressed in an attractive black cocktail dress with thin shoulder straps, frowned. “If you insist on asking questions like that, you will have to learn to whisper, Dr. Desmond.”

Now he was “Dr. Desmond.” Riding down the elevator, a Chinese red and gilt box which looked like a closet from Versailles, he had been “Seano,” his nickname among graduate students.

“Well, did you?” he said in what he thought was a whisper.

“And not a stage whisper either,” she said impatiently. “That couple at the table in the corner are from the Other Side . . . and *please*, don’t stare at them.”

He restrained the muscles in his neck. Gaby's alabaster shoulders, throat and chest, undeniably attractive, had about as much impact on him as would a statue in the Vatican museum. She had not created a suntan for herself, he noted.

Out of the corner of his eye he caught a quick glimpse of a man and woman in their middle thirties at the corner table. They looked like prosperous tourists from Topeka.

"Not the KGB type," he muttered.

"Who said KGB?"

"Nor CIA."

"Who said CIA?"

"So you won't answer that question? OK, what about Bethlehem?"

Gaby shrugged her shapely shoulders. "It was a night on which there was reason to sing. Do not misunderstand. Despite your religious superstitions about us, we do not act as messengers for Anyone. We are as ultimately uncertain about the existence of Anyone as you are. Yet we do have certain insights which on occasion we feel we must share with those who live on this planet. Sometimes we sing."

"Will you sing for me?"

"Perhaps." She sipped the seventy-five-dollar Côte de Rhône red he had ordered. He bet it meant nothing to her.

*Do Angels drink wine?*

Women, of whatever species, made Sean Desmond feel guilty. He had a lifelong history of letting them down. He failed his grandmother when he decided not to be a priest, his mother when he left the Church, his wife when he refused to fight with her, and his fey, shy, teenage daughters by not being an adequate father to them after Linda walked out with the hairdresser (female) she had met in Femtherapy.

To say nothing of the graduate students and junior faculty for whom he had proven an inconstant and disinterested lover.

So he gave up women.

And that was no help either.

"Is it necessary to stare at me?" Her large brown eyes regarded him aloofly.

Incredible long lashes.

"I'm a scientist," he found his quick Irish tongue. "I can't help but wonder if it's really you sitting across the table from me."

"What else would it be?" she said briskly, like a senior professor dealing with a dull first-year graduate student. "I appear to you in the form of an analogue: that is, what I would look like if I were of your species and at your stage of the evolutionary process. The energy patterns which constitute my body are not perceptible by your sensing mechanisms" — she shrugged those damn ivory shoulders again — "so I alter my energy patterns that you may perceive me."

"We can't do that."

She smiled, a patient mother with a spoiled little boy. "When your species evolves into its next phase, we presume that you will develop that power. It is not particularly remarkable. Watching your evolutionary process is one of our interests in this planet. It will facilitate our understanding of our own past."

Again he felt like a chimp in a laboratory.

"Why don't you appear like one of your damn ancestors?" he said irritably.

She threw back her head and laughed, the first time she'd done that. She was so heart-stoppingly gorgeous when she laughed that Sean had to hang on to the table.

"Our predecessors were not ugly creatures with six feet and whirling antennae and yucky scales, as your daughters would say. Nor were they cuddly little adorables like E.T. You would doubtless recognize them as fellow rational beings and graceful ones at that. But this overdecorated dining room would empty in a fraction of one of your seconds should I produce an analogue of your phase on our evolutionary process. . . . Incidentally, your friends at the corner table are asking for their check."

He pursued his catechism. "Are you really a woman?"

She was watching the couple from Topeka intently. And her answer was preoccupied. "Am I the source of life . . . no, you mean do we have sexual reproduction, don't you? You don't follow your own hunches rigorously enough, Professor Desmond. You say in your Nobel Prize talk that once there are biopolymers, then the emergence of life, organic structures, and memory and intellect — first unconscious then conscious — are inevitable. Do you not find bisexual reproduction as inevitable?"

Out of the corner of his eye again, Sean saw the man from Topeka give the *maitre d'* an American Express card — gold, of course.

"Angels screw?" he murmured.

Her brown eyes flicked back to him, like impatient bumblebees. "Your species's ability to use distasteful language for important functions is not attractive. But the answer is yes: we do join our energy fields as part of the reproductive process and we enjoy it far more than you. Feel inferior now, Professor Desmond?"

*So now I know I can offend mothers in two evolutionary processes.*

"You're a mother and a wife?" he asked, trying to cover his confusion.

"I am here to protect you because, despite your obnoxiousness, you are especially important to us," she snapped at him. "I have not come to discuss my personal life."

"Sorry," he mumbled.

"No, I'm sorry." She smiled apologetically. "I am unduly sensitive . . . and busy watching your friends who are now preparing to leave and are extremely curious about us. Yes, I do have offspring and yes I had a . . .

spouse, to use your word. He is no longer . . . we are mortal too, like all energy patterns. We live much longer than you do, relatively speaking. Yet it does not seem long enough. . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"And you do not go gentle into that good night either?"

"We are no more certain that there is Anyone waiting in that good night. There are excellent reasons . . . and yet . . . they are coming over here . . ."

Gaby stiffened, presumably preparing again for her Wonder-Woman routine.

But the tourists from Topeka seemed eminently friendly.

"Doctor Desmond, isn't it?" said the man, overweight, balding, and genial. "We don't often see red-haired, freckle-faced leprechauns on the cover of *Time*. Congratulations on your prize, we're all proud of you."

Their name, appropriately, was Jones; and they were from Toledo, not from Topeka.

"My assistant . . ." he began to introduce Gaby and realized he didn't know what name she was using.

"Doctor Gabriella Light," she said, smiling easily.

"We hope you have a wonderful time in Stockholm," said Mrs. Jones, a dumpy, pleasant woman.

"They seem like nice, ordinary people," Sean said after they left.

"Don't they?" She watched them intently as they walked out of the dining room. "Nevertheless, they are on the Other Side. Yet I do not understand . . ."

"Maybe they're more interested in you than in me."

Her head turned quickly. "A possibility, surely. Though it would not make much sense . . . still . . ."

He wanted to finish tonight's lesson on the anthropology — probably the wrong word — of angels.

"Do . . . uh, I mean, widows . . . remarry in your culture?"

"I suppose you are going to insist that I find myself another complement and settle down?" she said hotly. "I will accept such importune suggestions from my own species but not from another."

"I'm importuned the same way," he said, trying to sound wry and whimsical.

"But I chose well; I did not combine with a bitch merely to anger my family. . . ." She drew a deep breath. "I am sorry, Seano, you have touched a sensitive . . ." She smiled winningly. "You do have a record of making members of the opposite sex angry, don't you?"

"Only in two evolutionary processes, though," he replied, feeling like an adorable golden retriever who had made a mess on the parlor floor.

"And I don't consider you to be either a chimp or an Irish setter," she insisted, touching his hand. "Rather you are a fellow pilgrim, a companion on the journey."

He decided that he would do his part to ease the tension. "Well, I guess I

may have paid too much attention to Sister Intemerata when she said that the only sin the angels could commit was pride. . . .”

She relaxed, accepting his offer of truce. “We are victims of all seven of your cardinal sins and a few others besides. . . .”

“So you don’t do only the sin of Lucifer, refusing to serve even God?”

Gaby exploded from her chair, like a rocket racing for orbit.

“You shanty Irish bastard . . . I don’t care whether they kill you or not!”

She stormed out of the dining room, a Fury in retreat.

Sean emptied the Côte de Rhône into his wine glass and drank it thoughtfully.

He then withdrew to the oak-paneled bar, the former dining room of the Villard House, ordered two glasses of Napoleon Special Reserve and withdrew to the Gold Room, a gilt mausoleum with LaFarge paintings at either end and a live harpist playing on the balcony beneath one of the LaFarges.

Gaby had said that the place was a poor imitation of the real Renaissance palaces in their prime. Implying that she had been in them in their prime.

He then dispatched with equal thoughtfulness the two glasses of cognac.

*What did I say?*

He was not particularly worried that anyone would attempt to kill him. Gaby was not the sort of . . . of guardian angel that would leave him unguarded.

Could she bilocate? Was that one of the other easy things at their stage in the evolutionary process?

*Irish setter indeed. I thought golden retriever.*

*I should be an Irish wolfhound — lordly, charming, gentle.*

All his life Sean had been “cute,” not impressive, an adorable if neurotic Irish setter. That’s probably what they would think at the Royal Swedish Academy.

He sighed as his grandmother had done, a long low County Kerry sigh, indistinguishable from the first phase of a serious asthma attack, and signaled for the check.

“Madame has taken care of l’addition,” said the maître d’. “In cash.”

Probably counterfeit.

A tall, blond, linebacker type in tuxedo followed him out of the dining room and past the pink St. Gaudens fireplace. *Gestapo*, Sean thought, ducked around a corner, and ran down the chandelier-lighted steps which joined the old-brownstone-mansion-part of the Helmsley to the ornate lobby. Through the arched glass doors, he saw the grim gray mansion of the Cardinal, huddled — like a puppy with its mother — to the vast bulk of St. Paddy’s.

*Maybe I should take sanctuary there.*

He made it to his elevator just as the blond muscle-man appeared in the lobby, from the other direction. *How the Hell did he do that? Or is that one of Gaby’s?*

*I should ask him if his name is Michael.*

Even if the cash is phony, the treasurer of the United States shouldn't be able to tell the difference.

"Gaby . . ." He knocked tentatively on the connecting door, which he was absolutely certain hadn't been there when he checked in.

"Come in, Sean," she said, contrition in her voice.

She was sitting on the edge of her bed, huddled in a shiny beige robe. No sign of the black dress. *I bet she makes them up and throws them away as she needs them.*

"I am very sorry," she began immediately. "My behavior was disgraceful. There was no excuse. You meant no harm . . ." She grinned shyly. "At least you know that angels are capable of many different sins."

"Not pure spirits," he said lightly.

"Neither pure nor spirits, I'm afraid."

"But not without virtues, like picking up the check."

"I will take care of the bills on the trip," she said, dismissing her generosity. "It will be easier that way."

"Do you have a crowd around here? There was a big blond guy in the lobby?"

She seemed interested. "Oh no, we are relatively few in number and have . . . far-reaching, let us say, responsibilities. I am the only one in charge of you."

*But you didn't deny that you were the big blond guy in the lobby.*

"What did I say wrong?" He sat next to her on the bed, though as far away as he could.

"Nothing, really, except your mixture of Christianity and Iranian mythology has always infuriated me by its inaccuracy and its arrogance. There is no need for devils to persuade you to do evil. You are quite capable of it on your own. And, Professor Desmond, as far as we can ascertain, there are no demons — some evil forces perhaps and not without power, but not personalized like your Satan." Her voice rose again. "And if you would read the Book of Job, which you haven't like most of the rest of the Bible, you would know that even Satan at that time was considered to be one of Yahweh's court and not a rival prince of darkness."

"No Satan?" he said, kind of disappointed.

"No Satan. . . . And Lucifer was not a demon, he was a good spirit, he never defied the Most High, he was brilliant and kind" — she clutched both fists tightly — "and deeply devout . . ."

*Gabriella Light. . . . Oh My God. . . .*

"And your, uh . . . complement?"

She bowed her head and nodded.

*Angels, he told himself resolutely, are not supposed to cry.*

★ ★ ★

**S**ean Desmond could not sleep.

He turned over in the bed, wished he had not given up smoking, and tried to review the data like a good scientist should.

There was someone in the next room who claimed to be an angel, indeed hinted that she was the angel Gabriel and that she had sung at Bethlehem on Christmas night. She had, apparently, saved his life by disposing of two would-be assassins, quite abruptly and with chilling efficiency.

She claimed not to be the pure spirit of Sister Intemerata's religion class, but a corporeal being whose energy patterns were not perceptible by human senses, though she seemed to admit that most of the phenomena which had been attributed to angels were the work of herself and her friends.

They are interested in the world and in some ways protective of it because it aids them in a comparative study of their own evolutionary process, one which is more mature than ours but not totally dissimilar from it. . . .

*She asserts that she is in fact the precise kind of creature about whose existence I speculate, mostly as a put-on, in my acceptance speech. And has more in common with such creatures than she does with Sister Intemerata's angelic spirits.*

*Why not?*

*On the other hand, why?*

*Why should anyone want to kill me? I'm a harmless academic, a phony Irishman who has failed at everything in life except biology.*

*And the science of biology at that.*

*I don't believe any of this.*

*And yet I sit at the dinner table, eating roast beef with her and drinking Côte de Rhône — for which she pays — as though it were perfectly natural to have an ice-goddess guardian angel protecting me.*

*A lot of horseshit. Someone is playing a trick. It's all illusion, a very clever game.*

*Lucifer's woman indeed.*

He threw aside his blanket, put on his battered robe, and strode to the connecting door.

It had not been there when he checked in. Yet it must have been there. Doors do not appear suddenly in the walls of modern luxury hotels.

*Hypnotism, that's what it was.*

Nonetheless, he pushed the door open very gently.

There was enough glow from Manhattan to see that she was not in the room. The bedclothes had been arranged to make it look like someone had slept there, but there was no one in it.

And no sign of either the black frock or the beige robe. Indeed, no sign in the room or the closets or the bathroom that anyone had been there.

*Well, he said decisively to himself, that settles it.*

He was not quite sure, however, what it settled.



He touched the mattress of the bed. No trace of warmth.

"You really ought to get some sleep, Professor Desmond," she said sleepily, as he was slipping through the door back to his own room. "Since you won't fly on the Concorde, it will be an overnight flight tomorrow and you should not forget how you are on airplanes."

He knew what he would see even before he turned around.

Gaby in her bed, the covers pulled up to her neck, silver hair shining in the Manhattan glow.

He closed the door and made sure that it was closed tight, though he did not lock it.

*Tomorrow, I'll find a religious-goods store and buy a rosary.*

*And maybe a St. Christopher medal too.*

*Maybe every medal they have in the . . . store.*

**T**hey were swimming in the pool of the Grosvenor House Hotel, Park Lane, London SW1.

Gaby was sumptuous in a skintight white maillot. Angelic white, he supposed.

Her luggage consisted of a flight bag, a large purse, and a shoulder bag, yet she had a limitless wardrobe of attractive clothes.

That's easy when you make them up as you go along.

He asked her whether vanity in dress was a characteristic of her species and she merely laughed.

She had taken charge of the trip. She paid the bills (with cash about whose origins he did not want to ask), dealt with immigration and customs and airline check-in, ordered drinks on the plane, calmed his nerves as the 747 took off, even reminded him to phone Maureen and Deirdre — why did those two fragile teenagers have to adore him so much and thus increase his guilt at failing them?

She managed to have his acceptance speech retyped — he didn't ask how — and corrected the misspellings and the punctuation errors. She was a discreet presence in the background at his press conferences, hardly visible and yet conferring on him status and importance by her efficiency and charm.

The perfect assistant to a Nobel laureate.

*Does she sleep with him?*, he imagined one reporter asking another.

*I'm sure she does*, the other (female) would reply, *though I can't imagine what she sees in him.*

*If you punks only knew what she really was*, Sean said defensively to the imaginary journalists.

Sexually, she continued to affect him as much as a Venus dug up from a stone-age cave, though she was much better put together. How do you get horny over an angel?

But he had become dependent on her and in a weird sort of way fond of

her. It was more pleasant to have her around than not.

And she certainly precluded the possibility of his chasing after women.

An angelic function with which Sister Intemerata would have been quite happy.

She also had a streak of playfulness, almost mischief, in her. "We are much more playful creatures than you Irish setters," she had said, needling him.

So, despite the disapproving stare of the Cockney lifeguard, she shoved his head underwater at the deep end of the long, narrow, low-ceilinged pool: an English hotel architect's idea of masculine luxury — into which women had now been admitted by cultural norms which the artist who painted the half-naked Chinese women on the side wall could not have imagined.

Sean, an old hand at ducking women, fought back. He pushed her head into the water and held it there, wondering if you could drown an angel.

You couldn't, it turned out. Mostly because they were as strong as a Patton tank. She broke his grip with a quick, deft movement and came up sputtering and laughing.

"Angels can breathe underwater," she whispered in his ear.

The lifeguard walked in their direction, like an English cop approaching two undisciplined kids on his beat.

"'Tis the woman that's to blame, officer," Sean said in his Irish brogue.

"I can see that, sir." He paused and then walked back to his chair at the other end of the pool.

"Stupid limey," he muttered.

"Please, don't use the brogue here," she pleaded; "they don't like the Irish all that much."

"How do angels die?" he demanded.

She hesitated as she always did when he probed for information about her species.

"Second law of thermodynamics mostly. We grow old and begin to fall apart. We have managed to control most infectious diseases which harm us, though occasionally a microbe appears that causes problems . . . accidents, of course . . ."

"Accidents?"

"We should shower and dress if we are going to take the noon train to Oxford. . . ." Gaby insisted both on cleanliness and punctuality, though it was not clear to him that her "analogue" ever attracted dirt. "Yes, accidents," she continued, as she helped him climb out of the pool — a young woman helping an old man. "We can be affected by certain kinds of radiation, random bursts of protons which one would encounter in certain places. There are some disadvantages in our complex and intricate energy patterns. When they are disrupted by such intrusions they do not easily reactivate."

"You die?" he asked, wrapping a towel around his shivering shoulders.

"Indeed we do," she said somberly. "Now hurry with your shower, we will barely have enough time for the noon train."

Like all things English, the shower arrangements were quaint; Gaby had to go up a flight of stairs and Sean down a flight. It took a long time for the water to warm up. *So and so's believe in cold showers.*

As he luxuriated in the warm water and covered himself with soap suds, Sean wondered about proton blasts. *Angels ought to stay away from cyclotrons. They probably knew that.*

Another man entered the shower room, a strong-man type with bulging muscles and a thick black beard. Sean, embarrassed as always by his puny physique, turned his back.

*Could have gone back to the room, but herself doesn't want me to catch cold.*

*Chills don't cause colds. Well, maybe she knows something I don't.*

A vise closed on his neck and a huge paw covered his mouth. His breathing stopped as though someone had turned off the switch.

*The bearded bastard is killing me.*

He fought, as successfully as would a rag doll in the hands of an angry three-year-old.

This time his life did rush by. *Maureen and Deirdre . . . no one at all to take care of them, except the hairdresser (female) and Linda. Dear God, no.*

The act of contrition from Sister Intemerata's class came back to his mind as consciousness faded. He couldn't quite remember how it went. . . .

He was on the slippery floor of the shower room. The hot water was beating down on him. Fool must have bumped into the shower knob. A hideous bearded face loomed above him. The last sight he would see. . . .

*I am hardly sorry, no damn it . . . heartily . . . never could keep it straight.* Throat on fire, chest collapsing, heart about to explode.

Then he was free, desperately gulping for air.

A naked Gaby swinging the giant through the air, her hands holding his feet, as effortlessly as he used to swing a yo-yo.

*God, she is beautiful.*

The killer's head cracked against the shower wall and split in half. Blood smearing the shower wall and rushing down to the floor, mixing with the hot water, and streaming over him. *Roll away from the water, you damn fool.*

Then the bearded man's blood and body disappeared just as those of the killers in New York had. Heavenly garbage disposal . . .

Gaby wrapped him in her arms, like he was a boy child with a scraped knee. On the whole, a consoling place to be.

"Thank the Most High you are still alive."

He tried to say, "I'll drink to that," but the only sounds to come from his mouth were inarticulate gurgles.

Then they were in his hotel room and he was under the covers of his bed.

*We didn't take the elevator, I swear we didn't take the elevator. She's able to move instantly from one place to another.*

Gaby was still becomingly unclothed. So was he. Too sick to be embarrassed. Probably didn't mean anything to her anyway.

Her hand touched his throat, her large brown eyes were soft and gentle. The pain went away.

Then her hand moved to his chest. Pain there ceased too.

*She's healing me.*

Now his hand in hers. Terror left him. Shock effect too. It's as though it never happened.

"Nice trick," he said, his voice quite normal.

"Special treatment for Irish wolfhounds." She smiled, a loving mother again. "Now sleep for an hour. We'll take a later train."

She touched his head and he sank into restful sleep.

Only on the train to Oxford did he realize that he had been promoted to a wolfhound.

"Was there anyone else in the women's shower with you?" he asked as they sped through the water-logged East Anglia countryside.

"Two teenagers."

"They must have been surprised when you disappeared."

She turned away from the window. "I didn't actually disappear."

"You were in two places at once?"

"Not exactly."

"Don't I rate any explanation?"

She considered him thoughtfully. "You should discover us through doing the appropriate scholarly research instead of playing on my sympathies . . . in any event, it would be a mistake to conclude that I am confined to that portion of my energy field which creates the analogue. Our size is not the same as yours."

There were giants in those days, the scriptures said.

"So you can give the impression of being in one place, while you're mostly in another."

"Something like that," she said, turning back to her examination of the East Anglian fog.

*I'm still not convinced that it's all not a damn clever illusion.*

"Useful in a guardian angel," he said.

"Quite."

He put his hand in his pocket and clutched his rosary. Superstitiously, he pointed the cross at Gaby.

It didn't make her disappear.

**T**he Nobel laureates, thought Sean Desmond in Stockholm, were a pretty bedraggled crew — an opaque Chinese physicist from Cal Berkeley, a

bearded Marxist priest/poet from Latin America who looked like he was carrying a bomb (and who refused to don the usually mandatory formal evening clothes), a deaf-mute chemist from Cambridge, a nervous M.D. from Harvard who scribbled notes for his next scholarly article throughout the ceremonies, and the mandatory conservative economist from the University of Chicago who was more concerned about the closing soybean price on the Board of Trade than he was about meeting the young King of Sweden.

In such a group, a red-haired, clean-shaven, Irish-American leprechaun looked almost normal.

The ceremony had begun at three in the afternoon in the Concert Hall with the presentation of the diplomas and medals by Carl Gustav and the reading of the citations by representatives of the Academy, followed by fanfares from the Royal Swedish Symphony Orchestra. The other laureates all seemed awkward and embarrassed, even the arrogant monetarist from Chicago.

Sean Seamus Desmond loved every minute of it, even saying, "Thank you, Your Reverence," to the handsome young king and winking at his pretty wife.

It was the least a man with a long history of republicanism behind him could do.

Then the festivities adjourned to the new Town Hall which rose over Lake Malar like the Doge's Palace did over the Grand Canal in Venice (at least like it seemed to do in the pictures Sean had seen).

There were more trumpets, more ceremonies, more royalty; and then the traditional candlelight dinner featuring potage aux champignons, filet de boeuf Béarnaise (washed down with monopole rouge), and a spectacular ice cream dessert.

Gaby, absolutely stunning in a strapless white evening dress, was in close attendance, despite his weak protests.

"They'll think you're my, uh, significant other."

"You should be so lucky," she sniffed in reply.

Her eyes, keen and alert, swept the crowd as though they were vast brown searchlights. *How big was she really*, he wondered. The column of lights in the Helmsley had reached to the ceiling of his room. Was the real Gaby somewhere at the top of the giant hall, looking at every face to see if it revealed a potential killer?

He found it hard to believe that there had been two attempts on his life. They had happened so quickly and the traces were swept away so briskly that they seemed like brief nightmares.

And maybe that's all they were.

He was the last of the speakers. The others were incredibly dull; even King Carl seemed a bit bored with the bitter denunciation of American capitalism by the Jesuit poet. Sean decided that he preferred Father Higgins, the priest of his childhood, denouncing birth control every Sunday morning

as he sank deeper into the pleasant swamp of senility.

*Well, I won't put them to sleep,* he thought rather smugly.

"The Irish are accustomed to being last," he began with more than a trace of the brogue. Gaby winced.

At first his remarks were standard — chain of biological knowledge like the chain of life itself. Gratitude and praise for other scholars and colleagues. The expected hypocrisy.

Then astonishment that some religionists thought evolution took the mystery out of life. Actually science brought more mystery into life. The more we know, the more we know that we don't know. Many dynamisms which we have yet to discover. And others of whose existence we can only guess but which we know that we will never discover. Modern science reveals not a closed, explicable universe, but an open and mysterious one, which even hints at transcendence.

Some restless stirring in the audience, like they thought they were listening to someone halfway through a dirty joke.

From the very first minute fraction of a second when the "singularity" exploded in its Big Bang, the cosmos was biotic, oriented towards the production of life. The biopolymers were fated before the first second of the explosion was over and with them a universe teeming with life. It was inevitable that memory, intellect, organic structure, sexual reproduction (a wink at Gaby), and eventually consciousness, at first rudimentary, then advanced, would emerge.

He did not wish to enter technicalities of the debate about whether other life-producing, consciousness-producing evolutionary processes had been ignited in the universe. Thought it was terribly cosmocentric of us to doubt it, however.

And with consciousness, eventually Mind which, despite all the attempts to reduce it to biology and chemistry, seemed not so much to emerge from evolution as to merge with it.

The deaf-mute chemist, whose wife was scribbling a translation as he talked, looked at Sean as though he had lost his mind.

Much stirring from the anti-dualist forces.

No one would dare to say he was wrong, however.

Gaby tense and white. *What's she worrying about?*

Nor is there any reason, other than cosmocentrism, to assume that other evolutionary processes have not progressed far beyond ours. On the contrary, there is reason to think that in such advanced processes, brains will have evolved to such a state of efficiency in the use of energy and the bodies containing such brains to such a perfection of purpose that only those energies will operate which are essential for the use of Mind. Has not von Weizsacker said that matter is mind submitting to objectification? As evolution progresses, will not that objectification become more and more elaborate, subtle, and Mind-serving?

Others have suggested this — von Ditfurth, Vollmer, for example — (always useful to quote Krauts; no one thinks they're comedians). It is necessary to say it explicitly even though there is great resistance in the scientific community to what our research seems to be suggesting: such elaborate, sophisticated, and efficient brain/mind composites might very well consist of matter and energy patterns which would be quite beyond our powers to record — rational corporeal creatures whom we could not possibly see unless they chose to reveal themselves to us.

Such creatures may not exist, of course. I am not saying that their existence is proven, merely that there is a hint in the evolutionary trends we can observe that such beings are possible, even probable. As yet we are unable to assign a numerical estimate of that probability, but I would not place it at less than point four oh.

Rubbish, of course. But if you wanted to sound like a scientist you used numbers, even if you were only guessing.

Increasing restlessness and dismay in the crowd.

You haven't seen anything yet, little brothers.

"If such imperceptible creatures should exist — and I do not, to repeat myself, say anything more than that they are a distinct evolutionary possibility — they might well some day come among us. There is no more reason to think their modes of transport would impact on our senses than they themselves would.

"And if they could come among us, perhaps they already have, perhaps they are even present at this august occasion, perhaps amused by our dim probings, much as we would be amused by the doings of chimpanzees or Irish wolfhounds."

Gaby's eyes closed in dismay. She wasn't ready for that ad-lib.

"Is it not possible that the stories of spiritual beings which are to be found in every cultural tradition in the world are hints of the presence of such corporeal intelligences which our sense mechanisms do not record? May not such beings, for example, have sung on the hillside at Bethlehem? . . ."

Cries of protest from the audience. Call for the Inquisition, guys, the crazy Mick dared to hint at God.

Gaby was still there, but she looked like she wished she wasn't. *What's the matter, woman? I put that ad-lib in especially for you?*

"I do not insist that any of these hypotheses are true, or that there is sufficient evidence to make them any more than interesting questions. But I do insist that we now know enough about the mysteries of life and the mysteries of evolution to make them not merely interesting questions, but questions which must be asked not in the name of religion, which I do not take seriously — at least for the purposes of my biology — but in the name of pure science. To say that they should not be asked or cannot be asked is to abandon science to dogmatism, to replace inquiry with obscurantism, to ignore the demands of our data, and to side with those who locked Galileo in



a cell and burned Giordano Bruno at the stake!"

Wild applause as the leprechaun departed the podium.

Nothing succeeds nearly so well as martyrdom.

**I**f Desmond had not been sleepy and hung over, he would have seen the big trawler bearing down on them as soon as it had rounded the corner of the island.

He didn't know what Gaby's excuse was. And there wasn't time to ask her.

Gaby did not approve of the cruise in the archipelago. Despite the mild weather and the sunny skies, it was December.

Neither did the officials of the Royal Academy or the staff of the American Embassy. But Sean was adamant. He had a powerboat on the lake at home, was a skilled navigator, and insisted on seeing some of the locales of the Bergman films.

The Academy found a boat, the Embassy equipped him with a map, and a reluctant Gaby tagged along.

He had learned that she did not veto any plan on which he insisted. Probably something in her by-laws.

She was horrified that he had agreed to visit von Helmstadt in Leipzig. "The man was a Nazi," she insisted.

"My father supported Joe McCarthy."

"You're not *that* dumb."

"He claims to have tape recordings of messages from the creatures I talked about. He's one of the few scholars to take my acceptance speech seriously."

"He's quite mad."

But she made the travel arrangements for Leipzig.

She was also a bit of a comic. All bills were paid in cash, and with fresh new bills of the local currency which Gaby crackled in her fingers as soon as they had gone through immigration, without a visit to the currency exchange, of course.

"Thievery?" muttered Sean in disapproval, even though he was delighted that his luxury trip was turning out to be free.

"Not really," she giggled. "We're quite good at currency speculation, you know."

She also had adopted the trick of telling him she would meet him in the lobby as he left their suite for the elevator — and then greeting him, as the elevator door opened in the lobby, with a mischievous smile.

"Poltergeist," he said impatiently when she pulled her little trick in the lobby of the distinguished old Hotel d'Angleterre on Kongens Nytorv in Copenhagen.

"I am not the result of the neurosis of a pubescent female," she responded with a sniff.

"You should act your age, whatever that is."

"And you should realize that evolution is in the direction of laughter and playfulness," she said, linking arms with him. "In your world animal infants play, but for the most part only human adults. And, of course, only humans laugh. I might add that you don't play or laugh nearly enough."

"And I suppose you do play and laugh all the time," he said glumly, growing weary of her brief, schoolmarmish lectures.

"Not quite, no more than the characters in the Irish sagas, which a professional Irishman like you ought to read some day. But we have little choice in the matter. It is much more in our nature to laugh and to play than it is in yours."

*Damn arrogance of a superior species.*

Sean was delighted at the reaction to his acceptance speech. The American headline **Did ET Sing at Bethlehem?** had rung round the world. His press conference in which he had rejected religious motives for his talk had been a huge success.

The bearded Latino Jesuit denounced him as a traitor in the class war and a social parasite.

"Does God exist?" asked a supercilious English reporter.

"I'm not sure whether She does or not," he replied. "That is a question beyond biology."

The denunciations were violent. A group of biologists had formed a caucus to oust him from professional societies.

And *The New York Times*, at its grave, gray best, had defended him editorially. "The attacks on Professor Desmond reveal that the anti-scientific dogmatism of many scientists is as serious a problem as his brilliant satirical acceptance speech suggested that it is."

Point made.

He certainly was the center of attention at the Ball in the Town Hall, the night after the presentations. Until Gaby, dressed in an off-the-shoulder Roman-style dress which he suspected was totally authentic, insisted that they dance. She rejected his insistence that he did not dance by reminding him of his song-and-dance days in high school.

Dancing with her was like being swept away on a gently flowing river as it wound its way through Swiss mountain valleys. After the first few moments, Sean was convinced that his feet were no longer touching ground.

"Wonderful dancers," said the Chicago economist, smiling for the first time in the week.

"Dr. Light dances like an angel," Sean replied.

His toes were promptly stepped on.

He didn't bother to ask whether evolution was in the direction of dancing.

After the Ball, however, Gaby became solemn and nervous, apparently sensing more trouble. She would not give him any hints.

He sighed his County Kerry sigh, a sound which had absolutely no effect

on her. Obviously, such sighs did not represent the direction of evolution.

But in the brief, clear December sunlight a few miles outside Stockholm harbor, looking like a silver-haired Liv Ullmann in a multicolored wool jacket (produced from nowhere, of course) she seemed relaxed and at ease.

They, whoever they were, could not threaten him out here.

Then the big gray boat, a water-skimming prehistoric monster, roared around the corner of the island and was upon them in seconds.

Sean spun the helm of his twenty-four-foot Volvo cruiser as if it was a ski boat racing back to an injured skier.

The trawler missed them by a few yards. Its wake swept over the Volvo like a tidal wave, rocking it dangerously on its beam and drenching them with water.

The big boat spun around with unimaginable agility and swept back towards them. Bullets danced along the deck of the Volvo like fireflies on a summer night. Its engine died. The trawler loomed up again, as high as Sears Tower.

There was no time for reviewing his life or praying. Foolishly, he tried to duck.

The trawler disappeared.

A gigantic waterspout erupted under it, tossed it up in the air like a toy boat in a bathtub, and then sucked it under the water. In a few seconds, there was nothing to be seen but the placid waters of the gulf.

Sean opened his mouth to chide Gaby about the slowness of her reaction. Instead, hysterical babble poured from his lips. Soaking wet, battered, terrified, he fell apart.

Gaby took him in her arms and held him tightly, murmuring soft reassuring sounds.

He did not particularly want to be reassured, but her comfort was irresistible.

"Do you love me, Gabriella?" he asked.

She held him at arm's length. Her eyes bored into his. "With greater intensity, Sean Desmond, than you can possibly imagine."

*Oh, oh — the trawler might have been safer.*

"How can you possibly —"

"I know, you're a miserable, vain, contentious, trouble-making, shanty Irishman. But surely you understand that with Mind there comes love? Some pre-rational creatures have affection for one another. Your species, because it has more mind, has more permanent and powerful emotional attractions. Can you not imagine what love must be in creatures which are, if not quite pure spirits as Sister Intemerata told you, nonetheless more elaborate and powerfully mind?"

"You fall in love easily?"

She nodded, not in the least embarrassed by self-revelation. "We cannot help ourselves. It is in our nature to love. Is it not evident that evolution is in

the direction of love? Why are you immune to the logic of your own theories?"

"So you loved all the others you've protected the same way?"

His feelings were hurt.

"No, Seano, even by my standards, you're special." She grinned like an impish and indulgent young mother with a wayward but loveable little boy.

Maybe it was blarney. It was still nice.

"All right, sing something for me."

So as the boat — in working order again without his doing any repairs on the engine — chugged at slow speed back to the pier in Stockholm, she sang for him. The songs were wordless but they lifted him up off the earth beyond the Milky Way to the farthest galaxies at the outer reaches of the Cosmos, not as an awed and reverent pilgrim, but as a little boy cavorting and dancing in a splendid, fascinating playground, his heart filled with innocent, youthful merriment. And then he was swept along on a thousand breathtaking rides in a glorious amusement park filled with spectacular roller coasters and ferris wheels.

He wanted the Stockholm waterfront never to appear.

But it did. And she would not tell him whether it was the same song which was sung at Bethlehem.

"You're not *that* important," she sniffed.

It was only when he awoke in the middle of the night that he remembered that she had said she loved him, "with more intensity than you can possibly imagine."

A cold sweat appeared on Sean Desmond's skin. What do you do when an angel loves you?

**P**rofessor von Helmstadt's "Erich Honecker Socialist Work Center," on the banks of the Eister in the snow-blanketed rolling country outside of Leipzig, looked like a cross between a Victorian haunted house and the castle of a mad German monarch.

"Built in 1960," said Gaby.

It was about all she said as Helmstadt — a withered, gnome-like little man with a shiny bald head and a scraggly goatee — played show and tell with them, bowing repeatedly and calling them "Herr Professor Desmond" and "Frau Professor Light."

Inside, the Work Center looked like a modern prison or mental institution — concrete and steel, klieg lights, guards in Vopo uniforms, and technicians wearing stiffly starched lab coats like Helmstadt.

Spotlessly clean, of course.

Like Auschwitz.

It was easy to believe that he was mad, but hard to believe that such a dizzy old man had ever been a young Nazi.

The trip was a mistake, just as Gaby said it would be. The research of the "Socialist Work Center," into which the Democratic Republic had poured considerable amounts of money, seemed to consist entirely of tapes and slow motion pictures which purported to record the presence of "aliens."

"He says it the same way he used to say 'Jews'," Gaby whispered in Sean's ear.

Helmstadt's assistant, a Wagnerian heroine type called Frau Lutz, played the tapes and ran the films with a determined efficiency that would put a Mother Superior of the old days to shame.

Some of the tapes were a little eerie. One could almost persuade oneself that there were voices speaking on them, though why they should be speaking in German and mumbling East German government propaganda was not at all obvious to Sean.

The ill-concealed contempt on Gaby's face left little doubt about her opinion.

Then schnapps and sausage in the Herr Direktor's office. And more propaganda about how the "aliens" wanted to cooperate in the building of a socialist world order.

Sean wanted to escape the Work Center as quickly as possible. The American government knew where they were, but the Vopo uniforms made him feel uncomfortably like he was in a concentration camp.

"A moment, Herr Professor, Frau Professor," he said, flashing his oily, ingratiating little smile, like an innkeeper in a third-rate Gasthaus. "... if you please, Frau Lutz ..."

The two Germans stepped out of the office. Then Frau Lutz appeared at the door. "Herr Professor Desmond, if you please, we have a small token of our esteem ..."

Sean pushed aside his glass of the vile schnapps and walked to the door.

Frau Lutz pulled him through the doorway like he was a sack of moldy potatoes. Instantly, a metal door slid into place behind him. Two Vopos with machine pistols pointed in the general direction of his chest stood on either side of Helmstadt.

"Now Herr Professor, we will see a very interesting experiment, ja? We will see what happens to an alien walled into a cubicle of lead when it is bombarded by bursts of protons."

He opened a box on the door frame and negligently pushed several buttons, doubtless sealing the door. He did not bother to close the box.

"Gaby!" screamed Sean, leaping at the Herr Direktor's throat.

He was intercepted by two more Vopos, enormous storm trooper types, like the one who had almost killed him in the shower room in London.

False walls were pulled down in the outer office, revealing elaborate monitoring devices and a massive control panel, a miniature Houston space center. Several technicians were leaning over CRTs and spinning dials. Thin tubing was crammed into every inch of the wall facing the room in which

Gaby was imprisoned.

"A small and highly specialized mechanism with some of the properties of the cyclotron; I think you will find its operation very interesting, ja? . . . excellent proof of the superiority of Socialist science. It generates quite powerful bursts of protons . . ."

"Nazi pig!" Sean shouted.

"Frau Lutz," Helmstadt said, with a nod of his little head.

She jabbed a huge hypodermic needle into Sean's arm.

And the world turned to black ink for Sean Desmond.

**M**any hours later Sean was awakened with a rude kick in his stomach and, barely conscious, dragged out of the cell into which he had been dumped. His arms and feet were bound. His head felt like a thousand little Nazis were inside it, pounding with air hammers; his mouth was dry, his tongue enormous, his stomach a mass of pain.

"You've slept well, ja?" said the Herr Direktor, grinning up at him from the control panel. "Let me show you some interesting film taken from our monitors. Frau Lutz . . ."

Interesting they were — slides of incredibly lovely patterns of color and light, dancing and spinning, weaving textured images that suggested the sounds of a symphony orchestra whose melodies would fill the Cosmos.

"Ja, that's what our 'alien' really looks like. You will note that with the passage of time, the colors begin to fade. Our protons are slowly disengaging its energy patterns. . . . The most recent one, Frau Lutz . . ."

The colors were pale, the patterns little more than straight lines.

"Gaby," he croaked.

"Herr Schmidt" — Helmstadt pointed at a sandy-haired man in a white lab jacket — "is monitoring the emissions through another interesting mechanism which I will take great pleasure in explaining to you later. When the alien ceases to exist, we will be able to measure the remaining energy levels, compare them with earlier levels, and make an estimate of its composition — unless, of course, its colleagues wish to negotiate. . . ."

"Negotiate?" Sean tried to clear the fog out of his head. What colleagues? Which negotiations?

"Ja . . ." The little man shrugged nonchalantly. "We are civilized and cultivated humanists. If they wish to join our attempts to build a Socialist world, we will spare their colleague, for a time at any rate; if not . . . well, we will learn more about them from analyzing the debris of this one and capture others. Eventually, they will come to terms. . . ."

*Force angels to come to terms?*

"Hitler!" Sean shouted, doing terrible things to his throat.

Frau Lutz slapped his face, hard.

"You must to the Herr Direktor speak with respect."

"Ja, it is true . . . ah so . . . Lutz, time for the latest picture."

A transparency was removed from a box-like tube on the control panel and placed in the projector.

There were only a few thin lines.

"So, Schmidt, what discharges do you have?"

"None, Herr Direktor. All energy waves have ceased. Not gradually, but suddenly."

"Dummkopf, that is impossible!" Helmstadt rushed to the monitor screen. Over his shoulder, Sean could see that it was completely black.

*Poor Gaby. Well, she knew now whether there was Anyone else.*

The Direktor was swearing a blue streak in noisy German, momentarily distracting the Vopos. Sean lunged toward the box on the door frame.

He almost made it. He jammed his shoulder against the box and pushed furiously.

But he didn't hit the right buttons.

A Vopo cracked him on the skull and he tumbled to the floor, a whole new mass of pain crowding into his head.

"He has become unnecessary." Helmstadt's voice came from a great distance. "Lutz, eliminate him."

Through a thick mist, he saw the Wagnerian heroine take a machine pistol from one of the Vopos and point it at him.

"Gaby . . ." was his final prayer.

The weapon in Lutz's hands melted, and her hands and arms melted with it. The Direktor's head dissolved into a messy white liquid, the control panel erupted in a series of rapid explosions. The Vopos crumbled to the floor, their uniforms covered with the same oozing cream that was flowing down the Direktor's headless lab coat. The wall with the miniature cyclotron turned bright red, like a blast furnace.

Desmond remembered the assassin in the shower room of the Grosvenor. *Try to keep a typhoon in one room. Fools.*

He felt himself rising off the ground and floating rapidly through the steel and concrete walls of the fortress and up a snow-covered hill. At the top of the hill he was unceremoniously dropped in a snow bank.

The Eister flowed on one side, a dark slash in the snow. Above him the stars watched silently. And on the other side, the "Work Center" glowed the same bright red as the wall in the control room.

Somewhere in the depths of Sean Desmond's drugged and battered brain a voice said, "This should be quite a show."

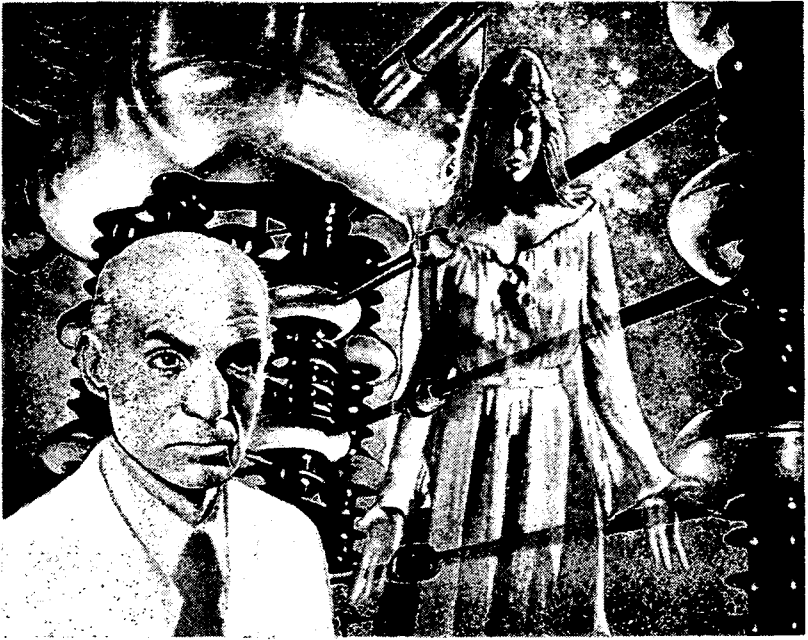
It was.

From the absolute center of the haunted castle, a broad pillar of white light leaped into the sky, dazzling, swirling, implacable light, glowing like molten plasma and turning the night into a blinding daylight.

*That's what she really looks like, a fusion reaction.*

Then the light ceased, as abruptly as it had appeared.





And the Honecker Work Center was no more. All that remained was a large black scar in the snow.

*Goddam Nazis. Mess with my Gaby, will you.*

And then he lost consciousness again.

**T**he young GI with the blue scarf and the blue beret signaled them through the gate. Gaby rated a smart salute.

*Good taste, kid.*

"Checkpoint Charlie," she said. "Feeling better?"

"You didn't need my help," he said, the words coming up from a swamp of confusion and pain.

"Will it make any difference if I say that I cherish your brave effort to help?"

"You must have kissed the Blarney Stone, woman."

"You are better."

"Don't you believe it."

"You did not remember London?"

"Only at the end . . . the real you never went into the Honecker Center at all."

"That's one way to put it. We knew that they were the ones who were trying to kill you. It seemed so absurd. There was so little danger to their work

in your speech. Then you yourself suggested that perhaps it was me they were seeking" — she eased their rented Mercedes slowly down the bustling Ku Damm — "so I had to find out their goals to report to the others."

"Your superiors?"

She laughed softly. "I don't think that's how they would describe themselves."

*My Gaby is the boss.*

"And you played the game out to the end to learn all the details?"

She nodded. "I am sorry that you were worried," she hesitated, "and not unmoved by your generous heroism. Yet I felt that I had to learn everything about their plan before destroying them. It was, after all, at least possible that they could do harm to my kind."

She turned a corner and pulled up to the Bristol Kepinski. *Nothing but the most elegant hotel in Berlin for my Gaby.*

"Were they going in the right direction?"

"Lock an angel up in a lead room and destroy her with puny proton blasts? . . . now we must get you up to your room and make those pains go away."

**I**n their dark maroon suite, her gentle hands made the hurt go away, mother again curing her injured little boy. As she started to sing, Sean comprehended for the first time that she had risked her life. Von Helmstadt and his storm troopers *might* have had something which could harm her kind. There was no way to be sure beforehand.

*And risk my life too,* he thought ruefully.

Then he realized that she would not have permitted any harm to come to him.

Her wordless songs created images of peaceful fields and lakes, quiet sunsets, sparkling dawns, and radiant blue skies: Minnesota in the summer.

His pain was healed but he was still groggy from the drug. The world existed in a hazy but pleasant confusion, and the world was entirely Gabriella.

He loved her.

A marble statue perhaps or a pillar of white fire. It didn't matter, he still loved her.

Unthinkingly, automatically his fingers went to the buttons on her blouse. Her big brown eyes widened, but she did not resist him. In the heat of his quickly ignited desire, there were no metaphysical or moral issues to consider. Only Gaby.

His lips moved to her breasts, her fingers tightened their grip on his head.

She was skilled in tender and prolonged foreplay. *It probably takes them a couple of hundred years,* Sean thought, as waves of sweetness rolled over him, like the peaceful waves of a caressing ocean.

Then, when it was time that he must enter her, their love changed. It became a fire rushing through a forest, a river plunging over a waterfall and dashing to the sea, a hurricane battering against the coast, molten lava running down a mountainside.

The sweetness, the pleasure, the joy were intolerable. Sean was drawn into a raging blast furnace, an out-of-control inferno which would devour and destroy.

Again he knew that he was going to die: ecstasy would tear him apart. He did not want to die, but he did not want to give up the ecstasy. Soon his heart would explode through his ribs and his body would tear itself into tiny pieces. It did not matter. Everyone must die. What better way than to be consumed by an overwhelming love?

Then it stopped. Abruptly and decisively the passionate embrace ended. Sean lay on his bed, spent and exhausted. Sexual fulfillment had not occurred and was both irrelevant and impossible. He had been pulled back from or perhaps thrown out of the blast furnace a second before his life would have been sacrificed.

That was good — he supposed.

Gaby had disappeared.

"It doesn't do any good to hide," he said weakly.

"I am so ashamed," she said, her voice disembodied as it was in New York. "My own arrogance —" infinite pain in that voice. "I thought I could control myself . . . I almost destroyed you. I had no right. . . ."

"It was an interesting experience," Sean replied. *My God, I can't fail this one, too. I have to think of something to say that will get her off the hook.*

"You humans think that love is something pretty and nice, like valentine lace," she said bitterly, "but it is a raw primal energy, an uncontrollable demand for unity, consuming, destructive, implacable. And of course, we cannot live without it. . . . I am so sorry, Sean Desmond, I will never forgive myself for risking your existence."

From the deepest recesses of the blarney which pervaded his personality, Sean plucked an answer.

"Ah, woman, you're a trial. When are you folks going to give up your ridiculous pride? You didn't kill me. You were able to stop. I learned a lesson about love. You learned a lesson about humility." His phony brogue grew thicker. "Sure, and it was a benign experience for the two of us."

"There is that . . ."

*Ah, she wants to believe me. That's half the fight.* "I'm still very much alive, after all" — *now I'm going to put my foot in it* — "and convinced that I had better find myself a wife. I leave it to yourself what you're convinced of. But stop feeling guilty that you cut it kind of close. And stop hiding."

"I'm so ashamed," she said, mostly convinced.

"Of being human? Or whatever the Hell you are? You're not Himself after all. You don't have to be perfect, archangel or not. Now come back

here . . .”

She reappeared in the chair next to his bed, her slip clutched modestly at her throat, a sheepish smile on her tear-stained face.

“ . . . that’s better.” *The woman was almost the death of me.*

“If there is pure Mind, Sean, you can imagine the power of that love. The exploding ‘singularity’ which began the Cosmos would be only a pale reflection. . . .”

“Terrifying,” he agreed. And then the blarney put in its last lick: “And if you’re anything like the Other, I’ll find meeting Him, oops, Her, an interesting experience indeed.”

She blushed to the roots of her hair. What is the analogue for that?

“You see what I mean when I say there are no superior and inferior species, Sean Desmond. We are merely fellow pilgrims, companions on a journey.”

*Some companion.*

She took his hand in hers, her big brown eyes filled with infinite and tearful tenderness. He felt very sleepy. He wanted to say, “I love you,” before he lost consciousness, but he was not sure that he did.

When he awoke the next morning, Gaby was gone, as he knew she would be. No trace of her clothes or her luggage. His rosary was gone, too.

And of course, the door to the adjoining room had disappeared.

**T**he crowded green 737 slipped through the rain and miraculously found the runway of Dublin International Airport. Sean was still smarting from the stern interrogation of the British cops at Heathrow who were convinced, apparently because of his red hair, that he was an IRA gunman. Even his Nobel Prize medal did not faze them.

*Limey bastards.*

He had persuaded himself in Paris that Gaby was an illusion, a fantasy run wild, a mild psychotic interlude resulting from the shock of the Nobel award.

Then Hastings had come down from Cambridge to lunch with him at the Reform Club and praise the outspoken courage of his acceptance speech.

“Good thing you didn’t go to Leipzig,” Hastings remarked over coffee.

“Oh . . . yes . . . I guess so.”

“I don’t know what lunatic things von Helmstadt was doing. The East Germans aren’t saying a thing. But the Yank satellites apparently picked up a tremendous blast there. Maybe nuclear: the Yanks aren’t talking much either. The next morning, I gather, though there’s been nothing in the papers, there was just a big black hole in the ground.”

“Imagine that.”

*Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I necked and petted a naked angel . . .*

The Irish customs guards waved him through with a cheery smile. He was

to meet . . . he fumbled for the paper . . . a Professor N. Flannagan from Trinity College.

A woman was waiting for him outside the door of the customs hall.

"Professor Desmond? Welcome to Dublin!"

"Gaby," he gasped.

"No . . ." she responded, flustered, "Nora . . . Nora Flannagan from TCD, Trinity College, Dublin."

On the ride into Dublin he realized that she was not exactly Gaby. Her complexion was not as perfect, her clothes not as chic, her confidence not as serene, her posture not as firm. In fact, she was rather shy and rather dowdy.

Yet she was still almost a mirror image. And the large, tender brown eyes with long lashes were indistinguishable from Gaby's.

What in the Hell is going on?

Her husband had died a year ago. She had two daughters in their early teens, Graine and Fiona.

*Isn't that nice.*

She realized that he had been suffering through an exhausting schedule. There was nothing planned for this evening. He could go straight to his room at the Shelbourne and have a good night's sleep. Or if he wished, there was a nice restaurant in a mews down the street from the hotel. . . .

There was a warmth beneath her shyness and a mystery inside of her kindness.

What kind of Irishman would turn down a dinner invitation from a lovely woman?

She flushed rather prettily. And her quiet smile was like one of Gaby's. The restaurant was cosy, the food was superb and the wine smooth and reassuring. Nora Flannagan blossomed under the influence of his smile and charm. With the right approach she would do very well indeed.

He'd learned quite a bit about love from Gaby. You must concentrate your attention totally on the other.

It would make him even more dangerous. Ah, well.

In front of the hotel, underneath a plaque honoring that wee gombeen man, Oliver St. John Gogarty, he kissed her, very lightly.

She had been hurt and was still fragile. It was probably going to be a long-term thing with her and you had to be very soft at the beginning of such things.

She would keep. And he could wait. For a while.

And she was clearly well worth waiting for. Not a blast furnace exactly, but a warm port in the storm.

There was another reason for his care and consideration.

Maybe those were not colored lights dancing intermittently at the door of the restaurant all evening.

On the other hand, as Sister Intemerata used to say, if you keep in mind that your guardian angel is always watching you, it's easy to be good. ☺

# Screen Reviews

by Baird Searles

## Battle Fatigue

If by no other way (and there are plenty), one can tell for whom most of the SF and fantasy movies are intended by the timing of their release: the floodgates are opened primarily in June, secondarily at Christmas, i.e. school vacation times. Now I'm all for kid stuff when it's on the level of *Star Wars*, but it's certainly wearisome when it's repetitive and/or dreary. Most readers of SF, being a tad more sophisticated in the field, get to longing for something adult, rare indeed in cinematic science fiction.

This summer brought less than the usual flood of any sort (usual, that is, as of the last two or three years), and all but one of the biggies were sequels.

There was, of course, *The Search For Spock*, the third *Star Trek* movie. Interestingly enough, in a poll taken the first week, some 3% of the audience thought #1 was the best, 40% went for #2, and 12% for #3 (the other 45% were left unexplained — perhaps that's the percentage of *Star Trek* fans that doesn't think at all). Now I'm a member of the minority. *Star Trek: The Motion Picture* was, so far as I'm concerned, just that: a motion picture. A big, beautiful movie, obviously taking as its model *2001*, and with a skilled cinematic director (Robert Wise) at the helm. Given all the grumping, this was *not* what was wanted. The second one was — it was an extended series episode, a little bigger, a little slicker. The third follows in that track; one might as well

have devoted space to each of the TV episodes as they were ground out weekly.

*Gremlins* was a distasteful combination of the cute and the gross, which seems to be what the adolescent crowd wants these days. *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom* had elements of both, aimed at the very young; whatever one thought of the first IJ flick, it didn't descend to the cute. This time we have a darling kid sidekick, and a ditsy lady who runs around and screams a lot. It comes out a good deal lower on the juvenilia scale. The second Conan movie has at least roots in printed fantasy, and if nothing more exciting crops up, we may devote some space to it next time.

But quietly, under the hoopla for those films, what should show up but an *adult* SF film, Luc Besson's *Le Dernier Combat* (The Last Battle). It had to come from France; in a way that's curious, and in a way, it's not. The French have always had a peculiar (by our standards) view of SF, as they have had with so many American things which they have adopted and made over. They seem to feel that SF and comics are the same thing; what naturally follows is that they don't feel the need for the rationalization and explanation which are the *sine qua non* for adult, Anglo-American written literature. What French SF I've read has made very little sense (and I don't think it's the translations).

But every once in a while, they'll

take an SF concept, dispense with any explanations or coherence, and turn out a sort of distillation which is fascinating. This is the case with *Le Dernier Combat*.

It could be called *Scenes After the Holocaust*. We are in a ruined world (how, what, or why, we're not told). What buildings remain are a shambles. There are few people left. Perhaps I should say here that the film has two peculiarities. One is that it is shot (beautifully) in black and white, which gives a peculiar *verité* to the ruined, devastated look of everything. The other is that there is no dialogue whatsoever. Has language been forgotten? You are not told (how can you be?).

There are three major characters who are, of course, nameless. They shall have to be called the man, the other man, and the doctor. The man is a loner, a wanderer, obviously a survivor. He has an encounter with a group who live in a wasteland gully, in abandoned cars. The leader keeps a dwarf on a chain, since he is the only one that can fit into an abandoned culvert to get their water supply. The encounter with the man ends violently; he escapes (I won't say how: it's a nice surprise).

The doctor (we presume he's a doctor — he lives in a derelict clinic and seems to know medicine) is seen in an encounter with the other man, who is attempting to get into the doctor's barricaded building. The other man is a fighter, though he looks like a wimp, with thick round spectacles and a podgy physique.

The man finds an abandoned hotel bar, liquor supply intact. He goes through various stages of drunkenness — you see him suddenly weeping over a book, which he reads with difficulty, moving his lips. In a sudden encounter

with the other man, who attacks immediately, he is badly wounded, and somehow makes his way into the doctor's quarters (you aren't told how, which is the only place it's bothersome, since the other man is trying so continuously to get in). The doctor, suspicious at first, tends him. There are delicious brief, wordless scenes of their comradeship as the man recovers: playing ping-pong; having a travesty of a formal dinner served from a horrendous frying pan, but with what is implied to be the right wine; the doctor applauding loudly (which stands out curiously in the wordless milieu) as the man takes his first steps on crutches.

The other man continues his assaults on the door; one is reminded of the tenacity with which cartoon cats besieged cartoon mice. Finally the doctor reveals the reason — he is keeping a woman concealed and locked up in the building. The other man is like an animal in heat, trying to get in. The doctor seems willing for the man to have her; apparently women are desired commodities. The other man breaks in, and the final battle occurs.

It is all infuriatingly vague, and at times comes close to incoherent surrealism. It is also continuously interesting and endlessly evocative. And though you're given no background and no rationale, you're sure there is one, which may be the secret of successfully pulling off this kind of thing. The Spielberg crowd will hate it. There are no effects, special or otherwise; it's not cute; and it's not gross except where reality demands it. And it puts some demands on the viewer; it's rather fatiguing. That's why it's adult.

## VIDEOWARES

**Zardoz** (Key) is probably one of the



most interesting science-fiction flicks ever produced. Director/writer John Boorman has made no attempt to make things simple for the feeble-minded, and the concepts fly so fast that even the sophisticated SF reader might find himself a little lost at times. To say that it concerns a barbarian of the future who tricks his way into an enclave of immortal intellectuals who have preserved the knowledge of this post-holocaust world is to simplify a lot, and there are twists and surprises even if you do keep up with what's happening. (Not the least of which is the meaning of the title.) Visually, it's a treat, and Sean Connery (looking splendidly barbaric with queue) doesn't have to transcend the material as he does in *Outland*. One can complain that things get a little too loaded with Meaning, and that Boorman has tried to create a Parable For Our Times, but all of that doesn't overload the sheer fun of it all.

**Phase 4** (Paramount) is another exceptional film, which few aficionados seem to know about. On the surface, it's yet another mutant-thingies-menacing-scientist-and-assorted-rural-types movie; but the thingies are mutated ants who have developed intelligence, and an intelligence entirely alien to man's. The attempts to communicate combined with the horrendous attacks mounted by the ants make for intelligent suspense, and the microphotography of the ant culture (including a stunning egg-laying sequence with the queen) is extraordinary. Highly recommended.

**Faerie Tale Theater** (CBS Fox) is a series that has been showing on cable TV and released almost simultaneously on cassette. Each show is an hour-long adaptation of a classic fairy tale; at their best, as in "The Sleeping

Beauty," which was the prize of the first lot released on tape, the productions are lavishly and tastefully fantastical, and the adaptations aim at sophistication and humor that adults can appreciate while not violating the spirit of the story. "The Sleeping Beauty" is a prize little playlet, with anachronistic wit worthy of T.H. White, wonderful performances by Christopher Reeve as a very square Prince and Bernadette Peters as a Princess both kittenish and catty, and sets and costumes of imaginative classiness.

Alas, the second set released on cassette contains a couple of bombs. "The Emperor's Nightingale" is merely rather dull, despite the presence of Mick Jagger as the Emp (the demi-Cockney accent does add a certain piquant quality). But the "Beauty and the Beast" is a scandal — or should be, if there were enough people out there who really know the cinema of the fantastic. I had set out to watch it with some trepidation, since there is the precedent of the great "Beauty and the Beast" made by Jean Cocteau, considered by many to be the greatest movie of pure fantasy ever made. After the first few moments of the new video version, I began to have a sense of unease, which rapidly turned to outrage. This is, in almost every scene, a direct copy of the Cocteau film: sets, costumes, ideas, many of the scenes shot-for-shot. The beast has the great cat's head, the striped forehead, the 17th-century black-and-white suit with the high collar; again his hands smoke after he has made his kill; again the living arms whose hands hold candelabra grow from the wall and point the way to Beauty. Oh, there are differences, almost all of which are due to cutting down to an hour's running time (the

entire subplot of *Avenant* and the magic pavilion is gone — thank God for small favors).

One can understand, if not condone, imitation in the face of such a great precedent, and it would have taken enormous courage to try a *B&B* in another vein. What is infuriating is that nowhere in the credits for the Faerie Tale Theatre production is any acknowledgement given to Cocteau. Anyone who hadn't seen it would think that all those wonderful ideas were original. This is true artistic crime; presumably not actionable due to international copyright loopholes. All one can do is cry "FOUL!"

### BOOKS-ON-FILMS

Despite its camp, late-show title and production, John Stanley's *The Creature Features Movie Guide* is an extraordinarily good guide to over 3,000 films of the fantastic. It has the customary alphabetical listing by title, enlivened at the beginning of each alphabetical section with an apropos drawing by Kenn Davis incorporating the letter (two pyramids forming an M

backing a mummy top the M section, for instance), and a "great" line from a screen classic ("There's a herd of killer rabbits heading this way!" from *Night of the Lepus*). There are also innumerable photographs.

Stanley inevitably uses some pretty awful humor in his paragraph-or-two reviews of bad films ("Voodoo venture vacillates; disintegrates totally when zombie is zapped by rays of sun."), but he seems to have an unerring taste in distinguishing the bad and boring films from the bad but wonderful flicks that we all watch for late at night. And films that should be taken seriously he takes seriously. The Searles test for this sort of book is the author's opinion of those splendid films, the obscure *Carnival of Souls* and the all-but-forgotten *The Innocents*. Stanley's views of both pass with flying colors.

*TCFMG* first appeared some four years ago from a small publisher, making it hard to find; now a revised edition is available from a larger firm, and it should be universally available (Warner Books, \$7.95, trade paperback). <

Well, yes; we are looking for stories, and from people who have never sold a story before as well as from long-time professionals. But no; we do not want to see you make the same mistakes, over and over again. So; we wrote and printed an 11,000-word booklet, *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*, to help you with manuscript format, cover letters, return envelopes, and other details of story submission, along with some ideas on Plot, Background, Characterization, and Invention. These cost us two dollars each, with mailing and handling; we'd appreciate receiving this amount (check or money order, please; it's never wise to send cash through the mail). If you want two copies, send us \$2.50; three copies, \$3.00; and so on: in other words, 50¢ for each *additional* copy after the first one, which is \$2.00. If you subscribe to **Amazing®** Science Fiction Stories today, we'll send you a copy of the booklet free.

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# ON SPRINGFIELD MOUNTAIN

**by Rand B. Lee**  
**art: V. Lakey/Artifact**



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ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Because of the man who came down the mountain, I go every March twenty-first up the trail to the cliff and there I sit, watching the clouds go by. I stay up there all day and come home to the farm in the valley when the sun sets. Most years I go alone. Once in a while, my brother Mystery goes with me, and I lie between his hairy thighs and he hums. He hums at the past, to keep it at a prudent distance, as though our intimacy were a circle of firelight and were beyond in the dark with yellow eyes. Of course, there are no yellow eyes of any consequence on the mountain. The sheep keep to the low pasture, and the megahepatitis burned itself out about the year I was born, and there are no dogs. Mystery says he saw a wolf at Christmas. It had a strange lower jaw, and it looked at him as though it knew what he was. He let it get away, which might have been a mistake.

We all make mistakes. I make a great many, my name being one of them; my birth-name was Indira but I chose Lily as my common name, and no one could be less lilylike than I. Mystery's name is John. Mystery suits him better. He is very thickly hairy black all over, soft over his broad places and tough and wiry in his secret ones. Although he's strong, fast, and very smart, he has never been able to speak, other than growl when he was irritated, and laugh, and hum. Daddy used to say that that was really all language was anyhow. He didn't mean it, though. He used to drink Shakespeare as though it were coffee.

We were drinking the last of our coffee the day the man crashed on the mountain. There were five of us then: Daddy, Mystery, Mousseline, Unch, and I. Mystery was stripping corncobs at the sink. Daddy was fiddling with dehydrator trays on the kitchen stoop. Mousseline was slicing tomatoes carefully with the very sharp knife; they were going to go into the dehydrator with a little sweet basil sprinkled over them. I was minding Unch in the corner by the dead wood stove. It was summer. We were playing with a grasshopper, making it jump back and forth from Unch's palm to mine. This was unfair to the grasshopper but good practice for me, and it kept Unch quiet, which was the main thing. We all had cups of coffee. Daddy had with great ceremony emptied the last can from the Springfield Kwik-Mart, saying, "Another good vice gone the way of cane sugar. Let us all give thanks to heaven that the era of caffeine jitters is over, at least for the foreseeable future." We cheered. None of us but Daddy liked coffee, but he was acting so forlorn and noble that we took our mugs and pretended that it was a big deal.

"Number One, see the hopper run," I sang. The grasshopper jerked and sprang into the air. Unch chortled. "Number Two, see the hopper go." It bounced out of my baby brother's chubby hand. Against my skin it felt dry and fragile. "Number Three, see the hopper, 'Wheel! " It hopped very high, overshooting Unch entirely and landing near the molding at the base of the wall behind the stove. Unch found this

unbearably entertaining. His eyes bugged out and he waved his hands in the air.

My sister glanced our way. "Leave that poor creature alone, Lily," she said. She had said it in various ways several times during the course of the morning.

I said, "Will you stop? I told you it doesn't hurt them."

"You wouldn't care if I did," said Mousseline. "You spend too much time around Jonah."

"What's wrong with Jonah?"

"Oh, nothing, except that twice I've caught him throwing things at the barn cats."

"I'd never do anything like that. I love cats."

"You would if Jonah pressured you," my sister said softly. She had not missed a cut of tomato. I looked Daddy's way, but he was talking with Mystery.

"I don't care about Jonah," I said. "I'm not the one who wants everybody to like them so much, remember?"

"Don't be pompous. It might make you nicer if you did."

"Oh, Moosie-May, go away!" I yelled. The cutting stopped. Daddy looked up from the stoop. My sister was biting her lower lip. Unch, feeling the tension, began to whimper.

"Lily," said Daddy.

"Well, what is it with her?" I demanded. "Has overcorrecting Lily become a current summer pastime around here? She started it!" I spoke loudly, knowing that I was in the wrong. Mousseline's name was her own fault; Daddy had let us all choose our common names when we got old enough, and she had chosen that one because it sounded elegant. You see, she thought that she was ugly. I never thought so. She was strong, sturdy of limb; not a pimple on her anywhere, clear black eyes and white teeth; skin the color of the extinct coffee. But she didn't want to be big and strong, she wanted to be small, slim, and floaty. For years Daddy wondered why, until one day while snooping I came across some old magazines that she had cached. There were lots of pictures in them of women who looked like starved dolls.

Daddy had not done the stupid thing, which would have been to confront my sister and make her burn the magazines. It was what he wanted to do. "Pure trash," he had said. "Pollutant as virulent as PCB's. Never let her know we know." And of course I had, one day during a fight with her. It had led to a family conference. "That was a very long time ago," Daddy had told her. "It was in many ways a perverted culture. They still used oil for energy, for God's sake. What was natural then isn't natural now."

"I know," Mousseline had said; and we knew that she did, and that that made no difference.

I thought of all this while Unch whimpered and my sister's lower lip got tighter; and I said, "I'm sorry, Mousseline," and exactly at that second our little brother exploded into a yowling terror. At the same time we heard the plane. Mystery was out the kitchen door immediately. I picked up Unch but I couldn't hold him; it was like trying to hold a squall. "Mousseline," ordered Daddy, and disappeared after Mystery.

"Let me," said my sister calmly. She took Unch from me and pressed her face close to his. I watched her expression change, like a still pool rippling under the impact of a stone. "Shh, shh," she said. "Shh, there, baby." I waited for Unch to quiet in Mousseline's arms, the way everyone always did; but he didn't.

"What's wrong with him?" I asked.

"Run tell Daddy," my sister said. Her voice shook, and her eyes held the same terror that Unch's did. "Tell him it's somebody else's fear. Hurry; he's headed for the mountain, he — " She stopped speaking and gave a horrible shudder. Unch wailed like a cat in pain. Then both of their faces smoothed out, and they blinked several times together. They might have practiced it. "Are you still here?" said Mousseline.

I ran. Daddy and Mystery were in the garden, staring up at the mountain. A trail of smoke was dissipating in the wind. The mountain is not a high one, but it is high enough for the sun to strike first when it sets. It looked like that now. "Two-seater," Daddy said.

"Daddy, it's burning!"

"The fuel exploded. Could only have been petroleum. The god-damned imbeciles." Mystery was humming. "How is Unch?" asked my father.

"Scared," I said. "So was the pilot. He must have picked it up, as the plane was coming in. He'll be okay." My father's face was impassive, and his beard made him look like a king. I said, "Could the pilot be alive?"

We heard hooves. It was Mary Dalby, our nearest neighbor, astride Chloe, my favorite horse of all time. Her son Jonah was sitting in front of her. We exchanged grins, but they were not very convincing. "Did you see him?" said Mary. "Definitely a him. Bailed out before he hit."

"Bailed out at that altitude?" said my father. "We'll pick him up with a spoon."

"I don't think so, Joe. I'm getting life readings. He's dazed, and in a lot of pain." Daddy rubbed his jaw. I often wondered how he felt, being the only nontalent in the valley; now I realized that he quite properly did not think of himself as ungifted, but as gifted in other areas than we. Mary said, "I think we should go after him."

"Maybe you're right," said Daddy. "If only in order to discover why the hell he was flying a god-damned oil-burner over a high fire-risk area in midsummer."

"What about the fire?" I asked. Mary smiled down at me.



"The pee-kinnies will handle it." To Daddy she said, "I'd like to team Jonah and Lily on this one; it'll be good experience. Alice Keenoy is heading up the fire team, and she could use Mystery's help with the animals."

"Fine," said Daddy. He glared at the mountain. "God-damned Republicans," he said. "If he turns out to be Health and Ed I'll pickle his balls in vinegar."

If only we had known.

So we climbed the mountain, using the same trail I use now every spring solstice. The sun was hot and the blackberries were in that irritating stage between hard and sour and soft and sweet. Jonah and I climbed side by side. I had never let Jonah pressure me into being who I was not, despite Mousseline's accusation; I will not deny that we were close. We had known each other all our lives. We had trained together. So we held hands when the trail allowed, touching talents through our fingers. "Getting anything?" Mary asked.

"More power, Lil," said Jonah. I boosted. Exactly what I did when I linked with Jonah I am not sure; to him it felt as though he were a wheel suddenly attached to a wind generator. He said that I helped him see and hear much farther than he could on his own. Jonah was a finder, like Alice Keenoy's little girl Jonna.

It gave me a headache. "Hurry up, Jonah," I said.

"Yeah!" exclaimed Jonah. "Yeah, that's it! I see him, Mom."

"Where?" snapped Mary.

"He's crawling through a bunch of berry bushes by the Sitter's Mound. He's real scratched up and his eyes are closed. Old; he must be Joe's age."

"Thanks," said Daddy.

"Any weapons?" asked Mary.

"Two, I think. A dart-thing attached to his left wrist and a powered-up Castleton strapped to his belt."

"Show Lily," ordered Daddy. All at once the world fuzzed over and in my mind's eye I saw what Jonah had described. "Lily, concentrate on the Castleton first. Do you see the cartridge chamber switch?"

"Uh, yes," I said. "If you mean the double plate opposite the belt snap. It's sort of different from ours, Daddy."

"Slide it to *eject*," said Daddy. I pushed at the plate.

"It won't move," I said.

"Either it's jammed," said Mary, "or the new Castletons have tamper-locks. She'll have to go for the snap."

"Done," I said. Undoing belt snaps is easy; I'd practiced it hundreds of times. The Castleton sagged into the leaf-mold. I pushed it as hard as I could, and it sank out of sight. "It's covered, Daddy."

"Did he notice?" said Mary.

"He's too far gone to notice shit," said Jonah. There was pleasure in his voice, which bothered me, as it bothered me when he threw stones at the barn cats.

"Now the other one," said my father. "What does it look like?"

"It's long and pointed," said Jonah. "It goes from the middle of his inside forearm to his wrist. It's held on by a strap, I think, but the material's thin and it's hard to feel it through the padding of his shirt."

Daddy and Mary exchanged glances. "What in hell could it be?" Mary asked.

"Doesn't matter now," announced Jonah. "He's out."

My head cleared, and the summer morning flooded it again. "Come on," said Mary, and we headed for Sitter's Mound.

It is the place where I go now, to watch the clouds, a low heap of stones softened by alpines, just the right cradle for buttocks and spine. The trail continues to climb beyond it. Mary always claimed that it was an old Indian mound, but Daddy called her a romantic; one year the controversy grew so heated that all the finders got together and probed the heap. All they found was a welded box full of cat bones and some aluminum studs from a decayed pet-collar. "Indian mound," Daddy had snorted. "A monument to the sentimentalism of one of the ancient Springfielders." Mary had turned red and the incident had passed into a local joke. But I had thought, *They weren't all selfish tree-killers*, and it made me feel closer to the folk whom the early plagues had taken.

Near the Mound we found the man. He was closer to Mary's age than Daddy's, about forty. He was clean-shaven, and bloody where he wasn't burned. Smoke stained the sky black, but we could see neither wreckage nor flames. "Lily, help me," said Mary. I knelt with her. She had peeled back the cloth from the man's left arm, and there the dart-thing lay, gleaming silver in the summer sun. "We've got to take it off," said she. "It's a bomb."

"A bomb?" exclaimed Daddy. "That's insane."

"It's right there in our visitor's mind," said Mary grimly. "It's not explosive, but it's bad enough: it emits a series of ultrasonic bursts that act on the same centers of the cortex that a mindburn does. I read no mention of a hair-trigger, but he may be blocking."

"How?" I asked. "He's passed out."

"A trained sike can withdraw from pain and still stay fully aware," said Daddy. "Mary can read his memory because that's in chemical record. He could be doing anything back in the stacks."

"Not without breathing," remarked Jonah. "Which he hasn't been doing."

"Kennedy," swore Daddy. "Move, Mary." He pushed her out of the way, turned the pilot on his back, and began giving him artificial respiration. Mary did not take her eyes off the bomb. I had never seen a

mindburn victim; she had, during her days in Chicago, at the Health and Education Bureau Testing Center. "It's worse than rape," she told me. "It's like a lobotomy with acid poured into the wound. Only you can't feel a brain-wound, and you can feel a mindburn."

Jonah said, "If you're worried about a hair-trigger, we could always cut off his arm. That way we wouldn't have to touch the strap, even."

"He's coming around," Daddy said.

"A team's coming," Mary said. "The fire is under control. They're bringing a stretcher."

"What about his arm?" said Jonah.

"It won't work," snapped Mary. For the first time I saw distaste in her eyes, and wondered what their home life was like. "The damn thing is directly plugged into his central nervous system. We sever the connection, and it'll blow right away."

"And if we don't, it'll blow when he tells it to," said Daddy. "Come on; let's get this son of a bitch home."

The fire team showed up with Alice Keenoy in the lead looking murderous and no Mystery. "We found a couple of deer," she said. "Mystery killed one; it had been caught in the explosion. The other ran itself off the edge of the cliff when it saw us."

"Deer are getting smarter," said Daddy.

"Mystery says there are a lot of animals acting disoriented," Alice said. "He says it's all our sike activity."

"Disoriented?" said Mary. We looked down at the bomb. "Could this thing be leaking? Or building up to a burst?"

"Maybe he wasn't supposed to live through the crash," suggested Jonah. "Maybe it was a kamikaze mission to wipe us out."

"You're sick," I told him. He just grinned. Here we were, in danger of being turned into creamed spinach, and he was grinning.

"Any way of determining the thing's range?" Daddy asked Mary.

"Not quickly," she replied. "We're going to have to disarm it."

"But," said her son.

"By going to the source. If it's plugged into his nervous system, we're going to have to unplug it. I read surprise in his mind, not resignation. If he isn't a kamikaze, then there must be a way." She fingered my arm. "I'll need you and Jonah; the rest of you get the hell back down the mountain. If the bomb goes off, I want the bulk of the mountain between it and the town."

Daddy left without a word. He knew that he was needed at the clinic. Alice Keenoy didn't protest, either; she could start a doozy of a fire but she wasn't what you'd call brave. The team evaporated, leaving us the stretcher, and the three of us loaded him onto it and started up the mountain toward the crash site. It was a hard climb. I couldn't help admiring the man for having crawled as far as he had. We found his

parachute, tangled in a copse; half a mile or so beyond we found the plane. It was such a mess that we knew nobody could have survived had they been inside it at the moment of impact. The fuel explosion had blown it apart.

"Keep going," said Mary, and we did. We didn't stop until we had reached the top. The old county testing facility stretched away before us. I had helped some of the other children smash the windows, and there was wild soy everywhere, feeling its way through the ruins with grey tendrils.

The mountain had been called Cutter's Hill in the old, old days. It and the village at its foot had been part of a third-rate ski resort. Panic, brought on by the first plagues, had cleared out the valley. For thirty years it had lain deserted. About the time the first sikes gained national prominence, the Health and Education Bureau pronounced Cutter's Hill and environs suitable for resettlement. The old village had been burned in an effort to stop the spread of the disease; the town that sprang up in its place was named Springfield. Sixty years later, the valley was enjoying such popularity as it had never known before the sickness; craftspeople and rich back-to-the-landers had claimed it for their own, and the area had been redesignated part of the Americo-Canadian Wilderness Park.

Tourists followed, and fame. When the Bureau at last came round to selecting a spot for its county headquarters, it chose Springfield. Hopeful parents brought their children here to be prodded and scanned for latent talent. The facility had been operating only fifteen years when the plagues broke out again, and the valley died a second time.

Mousseline was two.

"Set him down there," said Mary. We laid the pilot in the grass near the Bureau steps. Some late butter-and-eggs were blooming by the railing. "Lily, link with Jonah."

"What are we going to do?" I asked.

"Find those neural hookups, by God."

So we linked, and we began the search. I don't remember much of this; I was in a sort of trance, boosting when Jonah said, "Boost!" and trying to keep my head from splitting under the strain. It seemed to take hours; I remember wanting desperately to scratch an itch that was maddening the small of my back, and feeling huge gratitude when Mary obliged me. Eventually Jonah said, from far away, "Look," and I saw what he was seeing. It was like being lost in a maze. There was no color; not even a proper image, really, so perhaps "seeing" is the wrong word. I thought of it as seeing, at any rate, and what I was seeing was a multitude of slim cables feeding into a soft-textured something that had life in it.

*That's it, said Mary in our heads. Now be very, very careful, Lily. They look large, but a hundred of them could barely cover your pinkie nail. You mustn't snap one.*

*What do you want me to do with them, then?* I thought. *Tie them in a bow?*

*Ease them from the cell wall, she replied. One at a time. Shape your thought into a pincer; make it as delicate as you can. That's it, but make it cloud, not metal. Yes. Now begin.* Under Mary's telepathic direction, with Jonah holding the flashlight, as it were, I disconnected from the pilot's brain each tiny circuit of the mindburner. I snapped ten of them. With each mistake I expected my world to wither in pain, and Mary had to remind me to relax over and over again. When all of a sudden Jonah broke contact, I was shocked to gasping. "Mary!" I said. Faces bobbed, and trees. I saw little Jonna Keenoy's tow head. She said, "I found you."

She was five years old. I said, "Where's your mommy?" My vision cleared. I was being borne down the mountain on a stretcher. I leaned back and saw Mystery's furry mug. "Everything okay?" I asked.

He nodded. "I found you," insisted Jonna.

"Hey, shithead," called Jonah. He was on another stretcher, slung between Roy and Paul Trevanian. He looked as though he had been run over by a horse. "We did it."

"What day is it?" I asked.

*The entire operation took fifteen minutes, said Mary in my head. Now go to sleep; you deserve it.* But I didn't want to, and so I was awake when Mousseline and Daddy met us at the foot of the mountain. He was carrying Unch, which I thought foolish. Behind them, the sheep meadow was full of people. "News travels fast," I said.

"I love you," Daddy said to me. The warmth in his eyes softened my headache. "Where is he?" The cause of all this hove into view. The silver thing was gone from his arm. I could not even see a mark where it had been. The pilot was lying on his stretcher with mouth open, face shut up tight. Mousseline looked down at him, and I heard her breath catch. "My God," said Daddy. I nearly passed out then, but I didn't. I passed out five seconds later, not too soon to have glimpsed my sister's heart go out to the wounded man, as a lemming goes out to meet a warm dark tide.

Jonah and I were in bed for two days because of the strain, not the same bed, though Jonah would have liked nothing better. We were both sixteen. When we got up and out, we found ourselves heroes. I was pleased because I thought this meant that Mousseline would stop treating me like an infant and start treating me like an equal. I was wrong. The first evening I ate with my family, she criticized me for talking with my mouth full, and I knew that nothing would make any difference, ever. Mary Dalby ate with us and gave Daddy a fretful report. "I took Clark Mott and the Mizzuz Hatch with me to sift through the wreckage," she said. "We found some odd stuff. Know what this is?" She held up a fused casing. "Careful; it's greasy."

Daddy took it. "Solar battery," he said.

"That's right. Our supposedly antique petroleum-fueled plane turns out to have been a custom sun-sparker, SunCessna 80."

"The pee-kinnies did put out a petroleum fire, didn't they?"

"They did indeed. Sort of makes you wonder, doesn't it? Why would a solar-powered vehicle be carrying a petroleum tank?" She tapped her front teeth with a stubby nail. "Another thing. Edna Hatch says the plane was autopiloted, and she could find no trace of a manual override."

"Surely with all that mess," said Daddy.

"Uh-uh. The petroleum tank was in the rear, with the cargo. The plane hit the mountain sideways, as though it had been trying to bank and took the turn too late. A lot of the cabin is intact. No comm. Comm leads, but they've been fused. The comm's slush."

"What sort of cargo was he carrying?"

"Hard to say; most of it was burned beyond recognition. But Clark found this." She placed it on the tablecloth. It was a dented black tapebook. "The title melted off; the case is heatproof, though, and the tape may be playable. If we can dig out the cassette, we can hook it to my console and run it."

"Anything else?" said Daddy. Mary frowned.

"Colleen Hatch acted antsy the whole time we were on the mountain. You know what she's like; ordinarily I wouldn't even have asked her along, but Edna insisted. She kept going around to the trees at the edge of the fire area and touching them. She told me they were sick."

"Sick in what way?" asked Mousseline.

"She said they were hungry."

"Radiation?" I asked Daddy. He shrugged.

"I'd better get back to the clinic," said my sister. She stood up, duty written all over her shoulders. "I'll have Lou's and my report ready in the morning. I think he's going to be fine, though. His burns looked much worse than they were, and the blood was from a scalp wound. He must have hit the ground rolling and kept right on going."

"Let us know when he's ready to talk," said Mary. "I'm most interested in hearing a plausible explanation for all this. Run a blood series; check him for the plague." Mousseline smiled.

"The only pathogens we're likely to find will be those he's brought in with him," she said. "This valley is clean."

It's strange what you remember. I remember how slowly time passed for me the next few weeks. Despite the mystery of the man in the clinic bed, and my fame with villagers who had scarcely spared me a glance before, I found the summer grinding on as Springfield summers always had for me. There were still chores to do, and tutoring homework, geometry in particular, which weighed upon me as the albatross had about the Ancient Mariner's neck. For two weeks our pilot did little but

sleep. On the first of July, Mary called a meeting of the Valley Council. Everybody came, including the Mizzuz Hatch, who never came to anything. "Many of us have report updates to give," said Mary. "Why don't we start with Mousseline?" My sister stood up tall.

"He regained consciousness a couple of times this past week," she said. Her finger went down a chart. "Two A.M. Tuesday, for a couple of minutes, to ask for some water. Again this morning, about nine A.M. He seemed very weak, but in good spirits." She glanced at Daddy. "I have a name for him."

"He told you?"

"Timothy Merrick." Somebody snorted loudly at the back of the room. We were on the clinic sun-porch drinking mint tea. Mary said, "Yes, Edna?"

"That's no name," the Mizz Hatch said. "That's a song." She hummed, then broke into melody. Her voice was a clear contralto, the only beautiful thing about her. "'On Springfield mountain there did dwell/ A likely youth 'twas known full well/Leftenant Merrick's only son/A likely youth near twenty-one.'" She let the tune trail off. "It goes on to call him Timothy. Timothy Merrick."

"Myrick," snapped her sister Colleen. "Lived in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. A rattlesnake killed him in 1760 or thereabouts, and a song-cycle sprang up around him. Timothy Merrick indeed." They cackled in unison, like the witches in *Macbeth*.

"That's the name he gave me," said Mousseline. She sat down.

"Thank you, Edna and Colleen," said Mary seriously. "Lou?" Lou Hunnemann stood up. He carefully avoided looking at Alice Keenoy, who was seated not far away, holding Jonna in her lap. Lou and Alice had been together for several years and they had broken up that spring. In a valley as small as ours, it's hard to get away from a broken love affair, especially when there's a child involved.

Lou said, "I ran the blood series on the hemograph. I got some strange readings. He's type O, no evidence of infection, though I found a number of floating bodies in his blood that I've never seen before. They look like mutated leukocytes. I don't know their function."

"When will you know more?"

"When I get the hemograph back." Lou coughed in an embarrassed way. "I, uh, inadvertently left it running all night and burned out the battery. It's in the shop recharging."

"Thank you, Lou," said Mary. Lou began to sit, then stood straight again.

"Oh, I suppose I should mention this, too. He's in his mid-forties, Caucasian male, athletic, good muscle tone —"

"We could see that, dodo," said Edna Hatch.

"— and he has no immunization marks whatever anywhere on his



body.”

Daddy blinked rapidly. “That’s incredible.”

“Unusual,” said Lou. “Even if the HEB had ceased mandatory inoculations in the past twenty years, we know he should have gotten some as a child. But I didn’t find any indication of it.”

“If he were an immune, he still would have had childhood series,” said Mousseline.

“Not if he was poor,” said Colleen Hatch. She stood up, grey and sharp like her sister. “If he was a poor child in the boonies, he might have missed ’em. Then found out he didn’t need ’em.” Lou sat down.

“Colleen?” said Mary.

“Yeah, I have a report,” said the second Mizz Hatch. “I was right about the trees. They’re all dead.”

“All of them?” said Daddy.

“Of course not. Just the ones around the periphery of the wreckage. The ones that told me they were hungry.” She smiled triumphantly. “They were all yellow. Chlorosis, a mineral deficiency. Don’t know why.” She sat back down, and folded her arms.

“Keep an eye out for any further indications of chlorosis on the mountain,” said Mary. “Colleen, I’d appreciate it very much if you’d let me know if any more plants tell you they’re unaccountably hungry. Mystery, what do you get from the animals?”

My brother raised his hairy black chest from the floor. *No hunger*, he signed. *It’s a good summer for them.*

“Let’s hope its stays that way,” muttered Mary.

Mary took a sample of the soil from the chlorotic site and ran it through the Sudbury analyzer. She found no lack of nutrients. In the beginning of the third week, Timothy Merrick’s right leg began to abscess where it had been scraped. Mousseline cut out the infection with the laser scalpel and Lou packed the wound with keratinol and goldenseal root powder. Mousseline then did what she called “listening” to the wound: she placed her gloved hands over the bandage and drew into herself. Jonah says that touching is important to the efficient operation of many kinds of talent. The mind and the body are two sides of the same coin. Even Mary agrees that it is easier to scan a person if she is holding their hand. My sister surfaced with a troubled look on her face. “It’ll heal,” she said. “But there’s something.”

“Complications?” asked Lou. I was watching from the doorway with a mask on.

“Maybe. There’s something odd about his blood, all right.” She groped for words. “It’s healthy. Can blood be too healthy? Not healthy peaceful; healthy guarded. Like an armed camp.” She wrinkled her broad nose. “Does that make sense?”

“Not if he has the efficient immune system we suspect he has,” said

Lou.

"I suppose," said Mousseline. "Only his blood doesn't feel like the blood of a normal immune. It's more excited, somehow."

"I've got to get that hemograph back from the shop," declared Lou. Later that day Mousseline and I were snapping beans on the back porch with Mary and Jonah. I plunked two beans into the colander for every one of theirs, because I can string one bean with my hands and another bean with my mind. Unch was feeding in the breast sling, slurping with customary gusto. I'm no more of an empath than the ordinary person, but even I could tell that something was bothering Mousseline.

Jonah, of course, was oblivious. "Shoulda taken his arm off," he said. "It would have served him right."

"The recrimination system is a lousy base for a society," said his mother.

"It's rather assuming that he's a villain," said my sister.

"Friends don't pack mindburners," pointed out Jonah.

"They might if they're soldiers," said Mousseline. Mary looked startled. "Who knows what he expected to find here? How long has it been since we had communication with the outside?"

"We haven't had phone service since '82," said Mary. "And they switched the radio access codes in '85."

"Fifteen years of silence," said Mousseline dramatically. "We don't even know who's President. Or whether our plagues leaked out, or whether we're part of Canada now, or who runs HEB-Albany."

"They must be keeping us under surveillance," said Jonah. "We still get flybys and drops every six months."

"Autopiloted planes with the same cargo each time," said Mousseline. "Maybe they photo us and maybe they don't. No matter what message we spell out in the cornfield, it doesn't seem to make any difference. We still get keratinol and battery parts." Unch fussed, and she switched him to her other breast. "I think Daddy's right: we've been put on the back burner, monitored but not very closely studied. After all, we've still got ten years to go before basic quarantine regulations require them to re-establish contact."

"There's no doubt we were an embarrassment to the Bureau," said Mary grimly. "A whole town wiped out under their noses, and they could do nothing."

I watched Mousseline's expression crumble and flow as she reflected Mary's sorrow. With an effort she smiled. "Maybe they've noticed how well we're doing," she said. "Maybe they've sent him in to check us out."

"Wouldn't that be lovely," said Mary. "An end to the quarantine before I'm eighty."

"They'll find us clean long before that, Mary," said Mousseline. Mary looked indulgent, the way Daddy did when Mousseline said this. "I know

you can't believe it, but I trust my instruments and my instincts. And his blood is very healthy."

"Our knight in shining armor," said Jonah. I could have killed him. "How long are you going to wait before you deep-scan him, Mom? You started to on the mountain."

"That was an instinctive and highly superficial memory-probe," replied his mother. "Purely for specific information regarding that sonic unit. A deep scan is something else."

"It's out of the question," said Mousseline.

"Why?" demanded Jonah. "The guy burns our woods and sneaks in weapons. Doesn't that warrant setting etiquette aside?"

"There's such a thing as a wise application of power," said Mary quietly. "It's difficult to scan someone as stressed as Merrick has been; even on the mountain, touching him for so short a time, I ran into blockages and static that laid me out flat. Another attempt could harm both of us. When he's out of danger, I'll try to secure his consent. You can't treat people like things, Jonah."

"Jonah can't understand you, Mary," said Mousseline. "Jonah still likes watching cats bleed. Excuse me." She took the beans.

She did not appear at dinner, and afterwards I was in the outhouse and heard her crying. I sat still until she had wandered by, then I slipped after her in the dark. The clinic is right down the slope from our farmhouse. Sheep graze around it, and at night you can see people moving behind the battery-lit windows. I followed my sister down the grass. If I try, I can keep things from making noise when I walk, and Mousseline was too wrapped up in her sorrow to tune into me. The pilot was being kept in the section of the clinic that Daddy laughingly referred to as the maximum security area. Thorny rosebushes grew under the windows, and only a cat or someone like me (who can push thorns aside without touching them) could get through. Mousseline went into the building and I waited, crouched among the prickles.

I couldn't have told you what I was waiting for. I heard her say hello to Bea Yoshida, who was over from Clark Mott's farm running lamb blood through the recharged hemograph. My sister passed from room to room, through the sike lab where Mary tested Jonna Keenoy every morning, past the medical library with the old wondrous paper books on creative sexuality (the source of many of my illicit childhood thrills). I heard her enter Timothy Merrick's sickroom. I peeked over the windowsill. She had put a lightstick near the bed so that it would comfort but not disturb. Everything was thrown into soft relief. His arms were outside his sheet; the light picked out their fur in gold. He had a yellow beard and he was very handsome. "Hello there," my sister said.

"Hello." I was disappointed to note that he did not have a deep voice. "Still Monday?"

"Tuesday," said Mousseline. She smiled, far more tenderly than I had ever seen her smile at anyone but Unch. "How's your leg?"

"Very sore. But you knew that."

"It helps a patient to complain. Releases tension and makes them think they're getting something for their money."

"I've got to pay for all this yet?"

"Through the nose," said my sister. They laughed together, easily, as though they were used to it. I wondered whether Mousseline had reported all of her conversations with the stranger. "Ready for supper?"

"You know I am."

"What would you like? We have chicken soup made from our own poor Bertha Doubloon. A great bacterial medium, but you shouldn't have to worry about that. It'd have to be a very tough bacterium to get past your defenses. We also have creamed chokes, in case you're a vegetarian."

"Soup, please." She went inside the kitchen and came back with bowl, spoon, and one of our rag napkins. I recognized the embroidery Mystery had done on it. "You've been running tests," said the man.

"Nothing sophisticated," said Mousseline. She sat in the chair by his bed and watched him spoon soup into his beard. "The HEB left us an old hemograph. We borrowed a couple of drops of your blood. You confirmed our suspicions."

"Which were?"

"That you're an immune."

"Well," said the pilot.

"The others think you may be in danger from our air, but I'm sure they're wrong. I'm a bit of a renegade, I'm afraid; I've claimed for some time that our plagues have gone the way they came. We were worried when your leg abscessed; however, it's healing much faster than either Lou or I can take credit for."

"Lou's the tall skinny man with the nose and the cold hands?"

"That's Lou."

"You're better organized than I'd expected. Good soup; poor Bertha must be congratulated on her taste." I found myself smiling. There was something about the man that made you like him, despite your reservations. "Have I been scanned yet?"

"Once, lightly. When we found the bomb."

"Ah."

"You're amused."

"You must think me very cold-blooded."

"No. You may be able to confuse a patty like Mary; she found your brain peculiar and tiring. You can't confuse an empath like me. Shiny things don't distract me."

"My," said the bearded man. "Just how much do you know?"

"I know that your name isn't Timothy Merrick."

He looked chagrined. "You know the song."

"You've come to Springfield Mountain," said Mousseline. "We all want to know why." Mousseline's expression shook me. I had seen the look in an old sentimental religious picture, *Christ Knocking at the Gate of the Heart*. I knew that she knew him for what he was, whatever that was, and that she accepted him in a way she had never accepted me. I thought, *If anybody can soften him up, she can*. But I did not really think that she was trying to do anything of the sort.

He finished his soup. She took the bowl and spoon and napkin from him and sat down in her chair and sang. Her voice was low, like Colleen Hatch's sister Edna's, but it was not as beautiful. She sang:

On Springfield mountain there did dwell

A lovely youth, I knew him well.

Leftenant Merrick's only son,

A lovely youth, near twenty-one.

The man laughed. "You're way off there," he said. She smiled and continued.

He'd mowed scarce halfway round the field

When a pesky sarpint bit his heel.

They took him to his Molly dear,

Which made him feel so very queer.

Fah lay too day too ay, lah too dee too ay,

Lah too day too ee, loo tee doo.

Now Molly had two ruby lips

With which the pizen she did sip.

But Molly had a rotten tooth,

And so that sarpint killed them both.

Fah lay too day too ay, lah too dee too ay,

Lah too day too see, loo tee doo.

The blond man shivered. "That always gives me duck bumps," he said. "You left out the verse where it gives his name as Timothy."

"I left out a lot of verses. I found six versions of the song in our copy of *The Oxford 2000*."

"I love that old book. I have the later edition."

"I know. Mary found it and played it back on her console. We have a guitar here, if you know how to use it."

"You're a resourceful group."

"We're survivors, Mr. Merrick." She got up and put the dirty dish in the kitchen. Merrick called after her.

"You haven't even told me your name." She came out.

"My birth certificate says Linda Smith-DeVane. My common name is Mousseline."

"It sounds like a French dessert," the blond man said. To my

amazement, Mousseline laughed, whereupon Merrick crooked his finger, whereupon she went over to his bed, whereupon he kissed her on the lips. They parted. I did not look for a time. When I did, she was standing straight again, unflustered, proud, my big strong brown beautiful sister. He said, "I'm not an enemy."

"Not an enemy," said Mousseline. "Lou will check in on you later. I'll see you in the morning." She left the sickroom. I sank down into the close darkness beneath the rosebush. I thought, *He kissed her. He likes her. Or he's trying to seduce her, the son of a bitch. Getting in good with the jailer's daughter.*

*Maybe she's seducing him, said Mary in my head. Ever think of that?*

I squeaked. *Mary Dalby, what are you doing spying on me?*

*What are you doing spying on your sister? I can get away with it. I'm your old, suspicious, wicked mayor. When you can match those sterling qualities, then you can spy. Now go to bed before I tell your father.*

I went. Mousseline came in a little later and went straight to her room. I knew I must be broadcasting my excitement loudly enough to wake a dead empath, much less a live one in the next room, so I got out of bed and knocked on my sister's door. "Come in, Lily," she said. She was at her dresser, brushing her bushy hair. She look tired.

"I saw," I said. "I'm sorry."

"I know it," she replied. "I'm too hard on you."

Incredulity. "You're not mad?"

"Some."

"I saw you crying. I wanted to help." To my surprise I realized that I was telling the truth. She nodded, looking into her mirror.

"I'm more mad at myself than I am at you. He's so beautiful that he makes me feel lonelier than ever. And he's scared."

"Of what?"

"He's going to die, Lily." She looked at me then. Her eyes were hollow.

"I don't know how. Not from plague. There aren't any more plagues here, and he's healthy. But he will die. He can feel it coming."

"Is he a claire?"

"Who knows? He's playing a little game, though, a guessing game. I wonder if we were ever in danger from him, even inadvertently. He's letting us think things."

"Why?"

"I'm not sure. To keep us from finding out something too soon." She shrugged, and stared off into space "We'll have to run more tests." I put my arms around her. She was cold as autumn. "Go to bed, Lily," she said.

Three days later, the rosebushes began to die, and so did Clark Mott's sheep. His lambs went first. Clark and Bea Yoshida homesteaded the southwest section of the valley, the area furthest from the crash. There

had been lean times and good times, and that spring had looked like the beginning of a good one, with a record lambing and goodly number of females. Clark's sheep were Merino hybrids, with fast-growing wool. It began to fall out in great hunks from the rams and ewes and in great patches from the lambs. Mystery came to Daddy where we were standing by the clinic, checking the yellowing rose leaves for insects. He was upset, but controlled. He signed, *Malnutrition*.

"That's impossible," declared Daddy. "Clark feeds them a balanced mix and the grass is good."

"Worms?" I said.

*No parasites*, signed Mystery. *Malnutrition. They're weakening rapidly.*

"So are the roses," I said. "Chlorotic, like the trees up the mountain." Fear tickled my belly.

"I know," said Daddy. "Let's not jump to conclusions. Mystery, get one of the lambs out here. No, take the hemograph to it. We may be dealing with two different phenomena. I want a blood series done."

*Bea's done one*, signed my hairy brother. *She found no pathogens.*

"Have her try again," snapped our father. Mystery loped off. Mousseline appeared at the window of Merrick's room. She was dressed in white. *Like a bride*, I thought. Daddy said, "God damn it, why now? Lily, cycle to Mary's and fetch her and Jonah here. I don't think we can put off interviewing our guest any longer."

When we got to the pilot's room, we found him sitting in a wheelchair, his lean blondness peering out from gaps in his robe. Mousseline sat on her seat by his bed with her hands folded in her lap. He stood when we entered. "Timothy's been filling me in on the latest HEB jokes," my sister said. "They're no better than the ones you tell, Mary."

"Hello," said Merrick. His hair was brushed and his beard was trimmed. He shook hands with Daddy and Mary. "You must be the mayors. I understand there's an additional crisis."

"Just some sheep off their feed," said Daddy. "Nothing too serious, Mr. Merrick. Please sit down." We all sat down. Jonah and I sat together, on the floor. Mary sat on Merrick's bed, and Daddy leaned against the windowsill. "This is my daughter Indira, Mr. Merrick. We call her Lily. And this is Mayor Dalby's son, Jonah."

"Frankly, Mayor DeVane, I hadn't expected a family gathering."

"Oh, the truncheons come out later," said Mary cheerfully. Jonah grinned. "You know why we're here, Mr. Merrick: we want to know what brought your aircraft to the mountain. There are several curious facts surrounding your case that interest us most deeply." Mary was wearing a dress, which had made me look twice; I had never seen her so formal. In his beard, Daddy looked reasonable, comfortable with his place and privilege. They did not fool Mousseline. Her fingers were pale where they clutched one another. "Now then, Mr. Merrick. Is Timothy Merrick



your true name?"

"No, Ma'am. It's Gary Loomis." He smiled sheepishly at Daddy. "I'm afraid I misled your daughter unintentionally, Mr. DeVane. There is a song —"

"We know," said Mary.

"I see. Of course you found my tapebook." Loomis cleared his throat.

Mary said, "What were you doing flying over a quarantined area and why did you crash?"

"I can answer the first part of your question much more easily than I can the second. I'm employed by the Health and Education Bureau as an agent in their investigative branch. For the past eleven years I've worked out of Albany, routine stuff, mostly, tracking down rumors of exceptionally talented children, operating our mobile testing unit in the boondocks. I was assigned to reestablish contact with you folks as a first step toward exploring the possibility of lifting the quarantine on the valley."

"My," said Mary. I heard Mousseline stir.

"How long has this move been contemplated?" asked Daddy.

"I first got wind of it five years ago, from a woman named Brunelle at HEB-New York."

Mary started. "Sara Brunelle?"

"I think that's her first name."

"Is she still alive? What do you know about her?"

"She was alive when I spoke to her three weeks ago," said Loomis with a smile. "I take it that you knew her."

"Knew her? She was practically my mother." Mary touched Mousseline's arm. "I've told you, Mousseline. Sara Brunelle was my tester at HEB-Chicago when I was a kid. She's the one who found me and took me out of that school. She specializes in extraordinary sike-potential. Not to blow my own horn. I lived with her until I was eighteen."

"She'd seen some reconnaissance photos of the valley," said Loomis. "I don't suppose you folks know, but things have been pretty crazy since the second outbreak of plagues. It's only in the last ten years that those of us on the outside have been able to put any pieces back together."

"We know nothing of the current situation," said my father.

Loomis expelled a long breath. "I can get into detail later. Right now I guess all you need to know is that unlike the first outbreak, when the plagues moved from east to west across the country, this time around the plagues broke out in several places simultaneously: here, in the Florida Keys, in Los Angeles-San Francisco, up in northern New Brunswick. Supertyphus in the South, flu in the West, you name it here. The North has been by far the hardest hit, which it wasn't the first time."

"So who runs the country?" asked Daddy.

"Not Washington," said Loomis. "Not for now. Congress meets in Philadelphia, of all places. How's that for historical irony?"

"That's farther north than Washington," I pointed out.

"But Philly domed up, which is what saved it, and Kansas City, and Denver. Californians don't like to be cooped in and New York-Washington couldn't decide, and they've paid for it."

"Back to basics," said Mary. "So the HEB is run out of Philadelphia?"

"Yes. With branches in Albany, St. Louis, Atlanta, Flagstaff and San Diego. Very loose structure; each office is pretty much independent. Five years ago, Dr. Brunelle called my boss and asked for an update on Springfield. She'd seen recent photos that suggested to her that a substantial number of you folks had survived." He licked his lips. "I'm afraid my boss put her off."

"He put her off," said Daddy.

"I'm afraid so," said Loomis.

"Then we haven't been monitored all this time," said Daddy.

"Off and on. The drops were kept on the basis of what information we had. You can't conceive the chaos out there, Mr. DeVane." He glanced at Mousseline for support.

"Don't try," she said. Daddy stared at the floor, wrestling.

"I can imagine your feelings," said Loomis.

Daddy threw back his head and folded his arms and laughed. "I'm sorry, Mr. Loomis," he said. "Oh, Christ; I'm sorry." He turned suddenly and stared hard out the window at the dying roses. "It's been fifteen years since we heard a word. One spring, when Mousseline was six, a group of us walked to the edge of the quarantine line. The last time we'd been that way, people in towers had heard our requests and we'd seen them honored. We hoped we might find a similar grace. Unfortunately, we discovered that the quarantine cordon had been automated. Three of us died."

"Oh, no," said Loomis.

Daddy spoke without turning. "Why was your plane on autopilot? Why were you carrying petroleum? Why did you crash?"

"Most new small-load aircraft are automated now, Mr. DeVane. You punch everything into the computer. The petroleum was on board in case I had to start a large fire." Daddy looked at him. "The town, Mr. DeVane. If I found evidence that the plagues hadn't burned out here, my orders were to destroy the valley."

"With everyone in it?" asked Daddy.

"Of course not."

"Why did you crash?"

"I don't know. Some failure in the guidance system. It was too quick for me to even attempt radioing for reprogramming information."

"And why were you carrying a Castleton?"

"For use as a cutting tool and as a defense."

"Against what? Maddened sheep?"

"Mr. DeVane," said Loomis slowly, "you must remember that we didn't know what I'd find here."

"Joe," said Mary.

"Now tell me, Mr. Loomis, why you brought a mindburner into this valley. Make it very convincing."

"Am I on trial?" asked Loomis quietly. "If I am, do I get a defense attorney? I'm not responsible for your Dachau, Mayor. I refuse to die condemned as a Gestapo."

My father swept the air with his big arm and slapped the blond man across the face with the flat of his hand. Mousseline cried out only once. There were veins in Daddy's neck I had not known existed, and redness clung to the white man's bearded cheek. Daddy stuck out his jaw and pushed close. "Never take that tone with me again, Loomis," he said hoarsely. "I don't care how much of a professional you think yourself, but never talk like that again, as though you were a Goddamned technician in a Goddamned lab discussing the casualties in your Goddamned test population." We were all breathing hard. Daddy clamped his hands on the back of the wheelchair. "We're going for a walk," he announced. He was fierce, dangerous. "I want to show Mr. Loomis something."

"Daddy, no." Mousseline had risen. She had taken hold of the lightstick, and I thought of the angel with the flaming sword who guards the way to Eden. Our father ignored her. He pushed Loomis in his chair out of the sickroom and down the clinic hall. Mousseline looked about wildly. "Please stop him. He doesn't know what he's doing."

"Calm down, Mousseline," said Mary. Jonah was already gone. "Your father has a lot to get out of his system. It won't do any harm. Let's catch up with them."

Outside, we fell into step around Daddy and the man. Nobody said anything. Somewhere I heard Clark Mott calling to his sheep. The sun flattened against the side of our barn. Our barn had been brown, but the years had scoured it to grey, like the barn in that Wyeth painting of the crippled woman. The many greens of Mystery's and my gardens spread around it like a shawl around the shoulders of an old man. Above us, the mountain dozed. Below in the valley, Mary Dalby's acres ran blue with brooks, and the batteries atop her farmhouse winked. We waded into weeds beyond the clinic. The wheelchair nearly disappeared. Daddy kept pushing, and though I wanted to laugh I could not. I dared not. We cleared the weeds, came out onto the horsepath. Instead of taking the path to Mary's, Daddy began to cut across the pasture, toward the edge of the woods. Mousseline grimaced. She knew where we were going, though I as yet did not. I didn't know until we'd crossed the pasture and the wheels of the chair begun to rattle on the old tarmac. "This is what remains of Valley View Road, Mr. Loomis," declared Daddy. "Good old Valley View. All the tourists used to come this way, to gawk at the hicks

with their compost heaps. If you follow it far enough through the woods, it'll take you in a windy way up the mountain. It's blocked halfway up — a landslide some years ago — but this is the way you'd come in the old days to get your kids tested at the HEB facility."

Loomis said nothing. His wheels raised dust; it set him coughing. Crickets scattered before us in blind panic. We walked the road I had always been cautioned not to walk, past Mary's ripening fields of hay and poppies, past her house with its wash on the line, past the fork to Lou Hunnemann's, always keeping to the right. The forest kept pace with us, dark and shivering in the July heat. We got to Lou Hunnemann's wheat and stopped in the dust. "Hey," Lou cried. He perched atop his mare and waved his hat. "Where are you folks going?"

"Why, we're going to town, Lou," said Daddy. "Want to come along?"

"That's not funny, Joe." Hunnemann closed up tightly.

"Didn't mean it to be," said Daddy. He resumed pushing. Lou sat where he was for a long while, looking after us. A while later I looked and he was following, wary.

I had never been to town. Before us, in the distance, the twenty-years-desecrated steeple of the United Presbyterian Church of Springfield piked the sky. It looked like all the steeples of all the churches in all the tapes. A swift swooped by us, hunting flies. We reached a sign I'd been told would be there: **WELCOME TO SPRINGFIELD, POP. 1500**. Someone had scratched through the **1500** and below it marked, **750**. Someone had scratched through that and on the edge of the sign written in hopeless red, **POP. ?** We looked at this for a while, then moved on. A battered green building poked its head out of a bank of gigantic sunflowers. "Power station," said Daddy. "Last chance for cars to charge up before the mountain." There were no other buildings for about a half a mile, just sunflowers and poppies, lush like dream-flowers. We passed a snake lying in the road. It was dead; it had two heads, one of them macrocephalous with bulging eyes. Mousseline was walking as though she were dead, too. Then we came to the first of the houses. It had an old-style solar-collector roof and yellow tile walls. Most of the solar panels were choked with wild soy. Mary stared.

"I know this," she said.

"You sure do," said Daddy. "Andy Brest and Bill Whitacre shacked up here. Bill owned the power station and Andy was one of our tellers. Their goat Irma ate Linda's best jeans." Mousseline's head jerked. "Linda was my wife, Mr. Loomis. My first wife, I should say; Mousseline is named for her. She was one of our initial casualties." Daddy started pushing again. "She contracted megahep Race II while she was pregnant with Mousseline. We didn't find out until it was too late, that being one of megahep's traits. Mousseline was born a very high-order empath. Linda

was low on the sike scale, a borderline patty. She could read my mind when we made love; that's about it. She was tough, though. She lingered for two years before she died."

"Jesus," said Loomis.

"Jesus was not very much in evidence at that time, Mr. Loomis," said Daddy, and the bearded white man did not say anything more for a while.

We passed another house, boarded up, non-solar; and another, barely visible through the woods, led up to from the road by a twisting drive whose gate hung heavy with blackberry. "Judge Keenoy's place," said Mary. "Alice's mother. I wonder if the piano still works in the parlor? I used to come and play it when the work at the testing facility got too much." Mousseline looked at Mary with the expression of one who has been betrayed. Mary ignored her. "I was twenty. God, Joe, do you remember what it was like to be twenty?"

"That was a hell of a lot longer ago for me than it was for you," said Daddy. "Twice as long, in fact." The road forked again, and we stayed right. "The left-hand is Cutter's Lane, named for the same Cutter clan that gave the old name to the mountain. See that red shrub up there?" He pointed. A northern bougainvillea flamed beside a cracked walkway. The walk rose in steps out of sight. "The PanCatholic Cemetery is through that hedge. Old Woman Cutter had a big herb garden and the tombstones were arranged around it. When I was a kid I used to steal lavender from the graves for my father. He liked to dry it and put it in bags." Daddy laughed for the first time since the clinic. The man in the wheelchair looked as thoughtful as a man ever looked.

"May I see that some time?" he asked.

And it was Mousseline who replied, "I'll take you there."

"Not far now," Daddy said. "Not far now to where we're going." We pushed our way through the village. We passed the burned hulk of the police station and abruptly we were in front of a sign saying **Main Street** and a great lawn rolled out a tidy carpet in the summer sunshine. It was Nevermow Greensward, Patent Pending as of the spring of '81; I recognized the habit of the blades and the queer metallic green sheen from a catalog-tape in Daddy's study. I stepped forward out of the shade of the trees. I didn't miss many things about the outside when I was a child, but one thing I did miss was ordering seeds and plants by mail. Mary and Lou had told me how they had been able to get seven new varieties of tomato every year, and eight new marigolds, and hybrid corn so sweet it would sit for weeks without losing its flavor. I stepped onto the Green. For twenty years and more it had dreamed the summers away, never growing any taller, never growing out of bounds. Daddy said, "This is where they're buried."

"Who?" asked Loomis.

"The people," said Daddy. "The people of Springfield."

"My God, Daddy," wept Mousseline. Her hands twisted in the folds of her white robe. "What's the point? Can't you leave well enough alone?" Our father said nothing. "Lily, will you get off the grass?"

"No," I said. I kicked off my shoes and socks and rolled. I heard Jonah's yell, and suddenly he was on top of me, digging his elbows into the lawn.

"Jonah," said Mary sharply.

"Damn you, Mom," said Jonah. He grinned into my face. "Hi, there, honeypot." He grabbed my breast, and I was giggling, but I was also pushing him with all my might of mind and body, and he rose into the air and flew ten feet before he landed with a thud in the street. "God damn you," he yelled.

"Damn you, Jonah," I yelled back. "How do you like being thrown like a stone? Now you know how cats feel, you sadistic little pervert taker." I was shrieking, not yelling. My head felt bubbly, someone else's head, not mine. Jonah picked up a stone and threw it. It circled the Green once, twice, and flew away into the trees. I faced Daddy and Mousseline. "I hate you being so afraid," I said. "You're always so scared of death. This is death right here." I showed them the Green. "So Moosie-May's mom is buried here, so my mom is buried here, so the guy who raped Mary and gave us Jonah is buried here, so what? I'm sick of death, death, day in, day out." I stomped the grass. "Look at it: it's alive, Daddy — it's ugly and perfect, but it's alive. It's good soil, Linda's asleep under it; we could plant it with flowers. Lavender, maybe." I looked at the man in the wheelchair. "Are you going to die, Timothy Merrick?"

"Yes," he said. He barely whispered.

"Did you come here to die, Timothy Merrick?"

He nodded. Mousseline closed her eyes. Daddy shook and shook. Mary smiled faintly, lost somewhere. I thought of Clark Mott's sheep, dying of vitamin deficiency. I thought of the roses dying of chlorosis. "Well, you can't die here," I told him.

"I have no choice," he said.

"There's no room," I said. I patted the grass. "We're all full up. Go die somewhere else. We only have room for twenty more. That's how many people we have left in Springfield, Mr. Merrick."

"Shut up, Lily," said Daddy. I did, but only because I had nothing more to say. "You were sent here to die?" he asked the man.

"Yes, Mr. DeVane."

"Why, for God's sake?" It was a plea. Loomis sighed.

"Because I'm a carrier, Joe. A Typhoid Mary. I never get sick, but I infect the folks around me. For a long time I didn't know it. I'm not really like Typhoid Mary, you know; I don't carry germs. I suppress immune systems, inhibit nutrient assimilation. Sara Brunelle was the one who diagnosed me."

"The HEB sent you here," Daddy said, "because they figured you couldn't make matters worse."

Loomis nodded. "Brunelle wouldn't let them kill me. She said I had a unique talent and that it wasn't my fault; it was an automatic, unconscious process. She said that my exile here could accomplish two things: take me out of circulation, so I wouldn't endanger normal immunes and the uninfected; and find out what had happened to Springfield. That is true, my friends. I really did crash by accident."

"They did the same thing to us," marveled my father. Loomis cocked his head. Daddy knelt on the lawn and fingered the short clean blades. "The Springfield HEB was not kind to us, Mr. Loomis. They walked out on us. The first wave of plagues cut our population in half. The second halved us yet again, both within a month's time. The Bureau decided that the diseases had been in our soil, mutating for a hundred years. The dogs died first, just like the old days; we should have remembered the signs and God knows the HEB should have. But they'd been so sure about the resettlement. In that month I lost my mother, my father, and my dear Linda."

"I was more fortunate, Gary," Mary said. "I didn't have family here. I was on my first assignment with the Bureau. I was the one who licensed Alice Keenoy as a pee-kinny, and turned down the Mizzuz Hatch for licensure, because they were crazy as loons. Joe was vice president of the local bank. Neither of us were infected; Linda begged Joe to take Mousseline and go. They wouldn't let any of us out. They said it would panic the country." The wind touched her hair. It was short, like the short grass. She looked at Jonah, lying in the street all curled in anger. "There were so many corpses we didn't know what to do. There weren't enough body bags to go around. So Len Milhaus got out his bulldozer and we plowed up the Green, here. Common grave, you see."

I could see them seeing it, and so could Loomis. Daddy said, "The medicoes pulled out overnight and without warning. They had the pity to leave their leftovers behind, some medicines, some equipment: a case of keratinol, bandages, a laser scalpel, the hemograph. The state police had already set up the cordon. I'm proud to say that none of us tried to escape. We didn't want our horror to come to the rest of the nation. And it did anyhow."

"Gary," said Mary, "you never did answer Joe's question. Why did you bring along the mindburner? As a defense against hostile sikes, as we assumed?"

"No," said the bearded blond man. Mousseline shut her eyes. "No, it had nothing to do with you people."

"Now wait," Daddy said. "We took that thing apart in the shop. It is indeed an ultrasonics unit. Don't tell us you brought it with you for target shooting."



"No, Mr. Mayor." Mousseline opened her eyes. "Mayor Dalby, am I right when I say that it was you who scanned me after the crash?" *You know she did.* I thought, then I realized that it was a rhetorical question. Mary nodded. "I can assure you that I was indeed unconscious. Mousseline has filled me in on what occurred; I have one point I need cleared up. When you scanned me for information regarding the sonics unit, did you read its range?"

"Well," said Mary. "I, yes, I did."

"No, you didn't, Mom," said Jonah from the tarmac. He sounded utterly disgusted. "Joe asked you if there were any way of determining the thing's range, and you said not quickly."

"So I did," muttered Mary.

"But we assumed," said my father. The bearded blond man nodded.

"Understandable. The pressure of the moment. You saw a possible danger, and you acted to circumvent it. But the unit wasn't for use against surviving Springfield sikes. It was for me."

"For you?" Daddy said.

"I told you: I was exiled here. My orders were to destroy the valley if I found it infected. If inhabited, to make report and arrange the removal of survivors to reclassification as immunes or quarantine in hospitals elsewhere. If I found the valley clean and inhabited, my duty was clear. It's a small place; I'm a high-order sike. I was to commit suicide, using the unit."

"So what do we do now?" It was Lou Hunnemann on his mare. I had forgotten him. Mousseline wore a calm strength. She was gathering herself for a task; I could sense the buildup of forces within her. "The mindburner's dismantled. What'll we do?"

"There are lots of ways to kill someone," said Jonah. Mary did not even turn.

"He's innocent," she said. "It would be murder."

"You're missing the point," yelled Lou. "He's killing Clark's sheep. He killed the trees on the mountain. He's doing it to the Goddamned rose bushes. He'll bring the plagues back, Joe!"

"Wait a second," I said. "The plague isn't killing the sheep; malnutrition is. Mystery said so. And chlorosis isn't an infection. Aphids can sometimes —"

"*There are no more plagues.*" It was Mousseline. She sounded like God. She strode forward into the Green and, taking my hand, turned to face Daddy. "His talent is twofold. It operates automatically and unconsciously, not like Jonah's finding, which he can turn on and off. More like my feeling, which is always with me. He's just told you this. He's told you that he both suppresses immune systems and prevents nutrient absorption by plant and animal cells. Gary, have you known the two sides of your talent to work *independently*?"

"No."

"Lou, did you or did you not find pathogens in the lambs' blood Bea examined?"

"Well, no, Moussel — "

"Why not, if Gary's talent suppresses immune systems?"

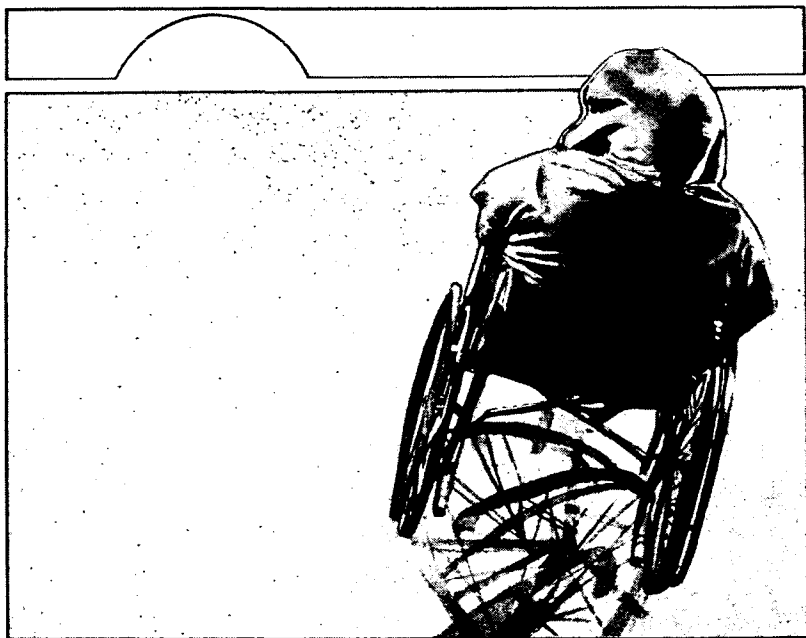
"Because there weren't any plague germs around to attack them," said Mary. A light had turned on in her head, as it had just turned on in my own. "Mousseline, you were right. It's the only possible explanation. Of course, we'll need to make more tests, but — "

"He could be lying," said Daddy. I felt my sister brace herself. "He could wield conscious control over his talent. He could be a criminal. The HEB could have flown him here, fixed the plane so it would go down in flames. It's possible." I thought, *This isn't my father*. Calmly Daddy added, "I'm not calling you a liar, you understand, Mr. Loomis." He would have said more, but Mousseline cut him off.

"There's one way to know," she said. "Link and scan."

"Here?" said Daddy, open-mouthed.

"Here, Daddy. Lily boosting; Mary probing; I reading what can't be faked by electronics. Lily, link!" She commanded me, and I obeyed her. I felt myself divide: Mousseline — I, Mary — I, Gary — I, woman and woman and man, black and brown and golden white, three textures,



surfaces touching. Linking. Then I felt a jolt, and Lou was there, cold-man, and familiar brassy Jonah. "Boost," said my strong sister. I boosted.

I don't know what the others saw, but I saw Daddy. Maybe this was Mary's doing, maybe Mousseline's. I saw him standing in a scrambled field with bodies all around him. He was impossibly young. There were trees, and a flag snap-snapping in a brisk breeze. He was yelling, "Go back," to the sky. The sky was made of brown earth, and it was advancing like a wave. The bodies did not move when he stumbled over them. They yielded, like the stones of the soft spring soil. There were hands and feet, bloated purplish. He got up and screamed. "Go back, God damn you!" The wave of earth crested and broke. Len Milhaus rode it atop his yellow bulldozer. He was screaming, too, but his tongue was black and he could not get the words out properly. I thought, *Daddy, get out of the furrows; the sarpint's waiting.* Daddy jumped.

He fell. And as he fell he wailed, *Why am I oh why am I oh Lord still in the land of the living oh great good God of Love?* He hit bottom. I swear I heard him shatter. In my head Mary murmured. The world turned green.

Daddy was lying in the grass. Mousseline was standing all white and tall above him. "You never really wanted a way out," she said. "Lily was right: it's been death with you from the beginning." *That's not what I meant,* I thought, *it's not.* "Mother begged you to get us out while there was time. You could have found a way; you could have bribed someone. But you clutched death to you like a wife, Daddy."

"You had no right," he wailed.

"I had every right," said Mousseline. "I told you the plagues were dead. Mary and Lou didn't believe me because they were afraid of being disappointed. You didn't believe me because you preferred the dark. You wanted to stay because Linda had died here and you kept hoping you'd catch something so you could join her."

"Oh, Joe," said Mary. Daddy's shoulders shook. Mary sat down beside him and cradled his head in her lap. He clutched her, living Mary, not death the wife. A minor point, maybe.

"Gary," I said. There were tears in his beard. "If they can't help you control your talent, and you have to live alone, there must be other clean places you could go. Alaska, maybe. We don't want you to die."

"No," said Lou Hunnemann. "We don't."

"There's no cure, my friends." He smiled at Mousseline. "I couldn't resist Timothy Merrick, not when I saw you and knew you for an empath. But you're not my Molly dear, to risk your broken tooth to suck the pizen from my foot. This pizen can't be sucked out." He frowned. "Drugs help some. A lot of them. Surgery might work, but not even a finder like Jonah or a kinny like Lily could pick the sike-cells from my brain without leaving me gibbering. And there's no time to search for a clean place. The accessible clean places are inhabited. Any time I spent searching would

endanger the very people helping me.”

The summer wind blew across the Green, stirring the rotten remnants of the flag on the pole before the Town Hall. Lou said, “So what do we do? What do you need?”

“Help to die,” he said promptly. “I know the new shortwave access codes. I can deliver my report via your radio. Mousseline told me you have one.”

“Yes,” said Mary.

“Joe,” Gary said. “Will you help me?”

Daddy looked up from his graves. “Yes,” he said.


We all did what we could for him. He got our radio working, and Mary talked to Sara Brunelle, who was in her seventies and unsurprising. We took him to the PanCatholic Cemetery where the lavender grows as blue as Unch’s eyes, and he picked out the place where he wanted to be buried, near a carved serpent. By then five weeks had passed since the crash, and the Mizzuz Hatch were bleeding from their gums. “Ascorbate block,” pronounced Lou. Clark Mott’s sheep had long since died. Clark and Bea had refused to hate Gary for it. “Wear this,” Bea begged him. He opened her parcel and found there a glory of black and brown and grey and yellow wool. “You didn’t take them,” Bea said. “We gave them to you. A burnt offering before the Lord.”

“It’s time,” Gary said. He hugged none of us, afraid, he said, that it would stir harm in us. He lay down in the lavender and pulled the cloak around him. Jonah would not link with me any more; I linked with Jonna Keenoy, Mary monitoring. Mary told her, *Find the dream gate, Jonna*. Jonna did, and I opened it, and Gary slipped through smiling. Daddy dug the grave, and Daddy laid him into it, and Daddy filled it. On top he planted rosemary he’d rooted from the hardiest bushes he could find.

“For remembrance,” he said. Mousseline turned away.

People came in suits. Eventually we were declared officially cleansed, and most of us left. Mousseline was one of the first: Dr. Brunelle took Alice and Jonna; I hear Jonna works for the HEB these days. Jonah and Mary left town when Daddy died, and came back eight years apart, Mary alone and Jonah with a lover who makes the best bread in the world. My dear furry Mystery lives with me, and Unch visits us in the summers to show off his wood-chopping muscles. Occasionally Mousseline writes. She got to California, where she married a kinny bigger than she was and promptly lost sixty-three pounds. Mary says I shouldn’t worry. “A heart like your sister’s always finds a pillow,” she says. I’m not sure what I think of that.

But I know what I think of death. Every March twenty-first I climb the mountain and nestle my rear in the new green on the Sitter’s Mound and think, *It’s spring*, at the clouds going by. They know it, of course. I’m not always sure that the mountain does. I like to think they remind it in the

morning of the year, when they wash the winter darkness from its cool grey sarpint brow. 

*Rand B. Lee, now 31, lives in Key West, where he grows tomatoes in containers, bringing more fruit to maturity than fiction. This is his fourth SF sale, and we have just bought his fifth.*

## TOURIST IN ESCHERLAND

The rooms are wrong. The water flows uphill.  
There is no steady sense of far and near.  
I know the center cannot hold, but still  
I'm tired of the floors becoming ceilings  
and window sills which suddenly appear  
where door jambs were before. I do not find  
the local wildlife in the least appealing;  
fish gape from leaf-strewn ponds, and lizards crawl  
from paper, dry and rustling, best defined  
as shrunken dinosaurs. The natives, prone  
to walking upside down, or else on walls,  
are strangely silent — lost, perhaps, in prayer  
to demons which reverse, becoming saints.

I never loved the simple lines of home  
enough. I dream of how returning there  
will be, how I will register complaints  
with travel bureaus, enter normal rooms,  
and feed my cat, caressing silky fur.

This foul vacation has become a tomb.  
I cannot find the exit, and my flight,  
that one-time bargain, fled. This night will last  
forever, filled with corners and the dread  
of scaly slitherings which cannot pass  
for anything resembling a purr.

— Susan Palwick

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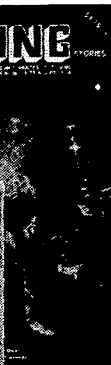
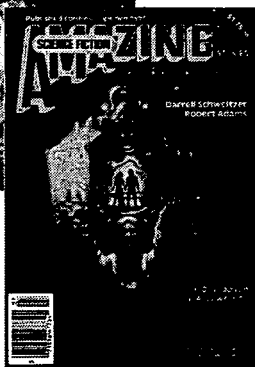
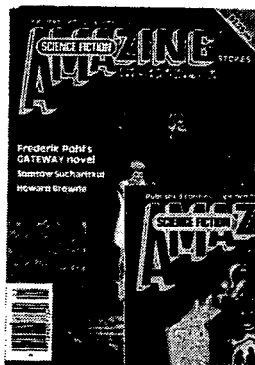
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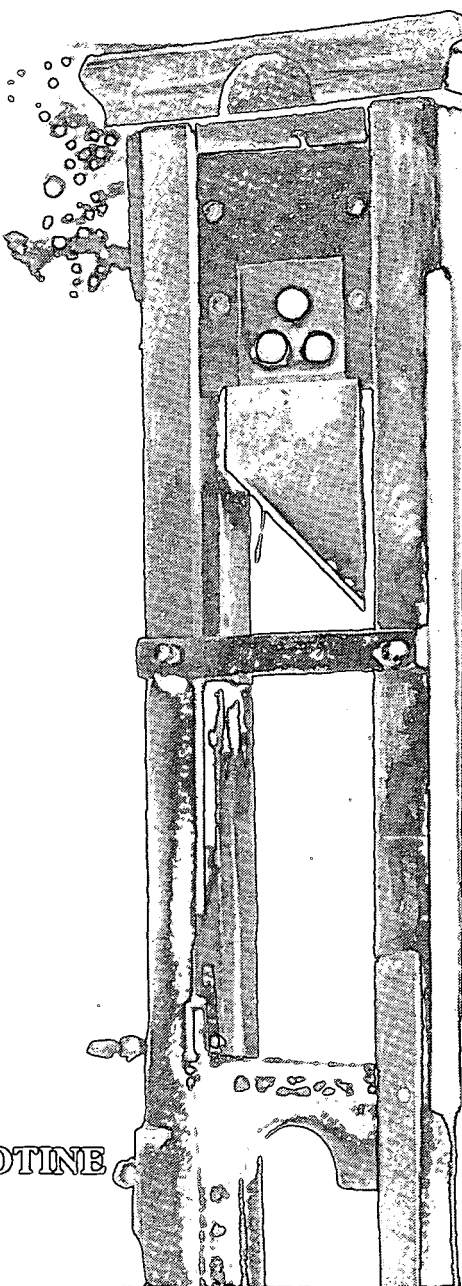
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# AFTER THE GUILLOTINE

by Tamith Lee  
art: Val/Artifact



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*Tanith Lee's most recent books are Red as Blood and Cyrion, both published by DAW Books. She has previously appeared in these pages with "Anna Medea" (January '83) and "Il Bacio (Il Chiave)", September '83.*

The men went to the scaffold singing the Marseillaise, or shouting, or in tears, or — all three. At any rate, they made a great deal of noise about death. The girl went sweetly and quietly, dressed like a bride. There was a reason for that. There were, of course, reasons for all of it.

To die at any time when you are not prepared to die is objectionable. To die when you are comparatively young, when there are things of paramount importance still to be accomplished, when, in dying, you will lose spring and hope, and those who love you, that also you love: these are fair causes for commotion. The famous figure, D'Antoine the Lion, however, did not roar *en route* to la Guillotine. He had done his roaring in the courtroom and it had achieved very little good, and actually some harm. He had presently been "legally" silenced, and that had shut up every one of them. D'Antoine's enemies were terrified of him, his speeches, his voice, his presence. Just as his friends loved him to distraction.

As the tumbrils jounced slowly along over the cobbles of Paris (a form of traffic that had become quite banal) the Lion only occasionally grunted, or flexed his big body with bitter laughter. D'Antoine, bully, kingly master, charmer, conniver, atheist. *I'm leaving things in a muddle*, he had said after they condemned him. For himself, he reckoned on nothing, once the blade came down — hence his bitterness and his lack of confusion. He was not afraid, or only very little. He had made his mark in the living world. "Show my head to the crowd," he would instruct the executioner. "It's worth looking at twice." Let us agree with that.

Héros, in the same cart, was one of those who sang, but rather negligently. The others who did so were mostly trying to keep their courage up; for while they sang, some of their terror and despair was held at bay. But Héros did not seem to be either depressed or afraid. His name, in this instance, is perfect for him, combination that it is of Hero, and Eros. Lover and gallant, the image that comes to mind is appealing. One of the handsomest men of the era, he is everything one would wish to be at the hour of one's public death: Beautiful, couth, composed. In his not-long career, he had enjoyed most of the sins and pleasures of his day. He had been in the beds of princesses, perhaps even of a prince or two. Aristocrat to his fingertips, he knew how to face this final couching. He sang melodiously. To the screaming rabble he was aloof, to his friends remotely kind. He kissed them farewell at the foot of the scaffold, and went up first to demonstrate how quick and easy it all was, not worth any show. Thereby offering a faultless one.

But in his heart, handsome peerless Héros had kept a seed of the Catholic

faith, which refused to wither. He believed, in some subdued, shallow bottom of his brain, that he was bound for Hell hereafter. As he disdained to fuss over the loss of his elegant head, just so he would not throw a tantrum at a prospect of centuries of torment in the Inferno. His coolness was therefore even more admirable. Let us pause a moment to admire him.

The third man we examine in the forward tumbril, Lucien, rather than being what one would wish to, on the day of one's public death, is more what one fears one would be. As some of his biographers politely put it, there had been some "difficulty" in persuading him from the prison yard. Once installed, raw-eyed from weeping, only the neighbouring strength of the Lion kept him upright. Then, as the reeking, railing crowd pressed in, anger and terror mingled, and rather than sing, Lucien began to shout. As the rabble screamed insults at him, so he screamed back. Ugly, where Héros was handsome and D'Antoine was grand, thin from prison, white and insane, and tearing his shirt in his struggles to escape the inescapable, or to be heard by the voluntarily deaf, he hurled charges and pleas until his voice, never strong, gave out. He had some justification. His was the spark that had initially fired the powder-keg of the Revolution. But no one listened now. The gist of all his words: *Remember what I did for you and set us free* — or, in short, *Let me LIVE!* — was entertaining, but no rallying point for the starving unanswered masses who, like vampires, had taken to existing on blood. There was, too, the matter of Lucien's wife, whom he adored, and who he feared, rightly, was on the same road to the guillotine as he himself. To no avail, naturally, he was also trying to shout for her life.

We may be unpleasant here and say Lucien shouted his head off. Or we could say, journalist and pamphleteer that he was, that he wrote it off, by going into print with unwise assertions and demands.

As for an afterlife, he wrote, too, that he believed in the "immortality of the soul." So he did, but in a somewhat scattered, indefinite way. He had been anxious to impress, through his prison reading, the notion of continuance upon himself, as if he would need it where he would be going.

Let us, for the moment, stop talking about Lucien. And go on to that far more visual creature, his wife, the lovely Lucette.

There must have been something about Lucien. There he was, ugly, and there Lucette was — exquisite — and they were blissfully in love through several years of marriage. Maybe she preferred older men — he was ten years her senior. Or *younger* men — ten years her senior in age, he was in many other ways younger than everyone. The crime which sent Lucette to the scaffold was love. Because of love she had attempted to save her husband's neck, and thus proved troublesome to his powerful enemies. Thereafter it seemed to them she might become, through love, a focus for strife.

She made the journey to the guillotine some days after Lucien, Héros and D'Antoine. She travelled with an air of calm pleasure. She said, "Lucien is dead and there is nothing further I want from life. If these monsters hadn't

murdered him, I would not thank them with tears of joy for sending me to join him in eternity." Lucette's inner secret was that she was by nature a priestess who had made Lucien her High Altar. She expected, after her sacrifice, to fall straight from the blade of the guillotine into her husband's arms. Despite, or because of, his rather Dionysian leanings — religions of music, drama, lilies in fields — Lucette believed in Heaven. That Lucien, regardless of his faults, was already there, she did not doubt.

So, in her white dress, her fleecy golden hair cut short, she went blithely up to the platform and lay down for the stroke, barely seeming to notice, they said, what the executioner was doing.

The guillotine is very swift and supposedly humane, but who knows? Stories are told of severed heads which winked malignly from the basket, and even of one that brokenly whispered a request for water. Doubtless the climate has an effect on an outdoor apparatus of this type — shrinking or swelling the metal parts; on some days it might do its work an iota more slowly, or more quickly, or more neatly, than on others. Nothing the crowd would notice, of course. And then the physique of the victim must be taken into account. A large neck makes its own demands, and the fact that long hair, collars and neck-cloths were removed, indicates even such as these could throw the blade. Louis Capet required more than one stroke; an un reassuring if unusual occurrence. Nor should one forget the condition of the subject's nerves — as opposed merely to his nervousness. No two human things are quite alike. One ventures to suggest that there have been as many different sorts of death under the guillotine as there have been heads lopped by it.

D'Antoine, for example. Who could judge splendid powerful D'Antoine would experience that partitioning in the same way as anyone else?

It seemed, when it came, like a blow, the blow of a sledgehammer, but not quite hard enough — so there was an instant's appalled thought: *Those bloody fools have botched it —!* Then the perspective altered. The eyes glimpsed the basket as the head fell into it, and other faces, already forgotten, looked up at it with anxiety as it came to meet them. After this the light went and there was only one odd final sensation, the head lying where it was, but the last reflexive relaxing spasms of the body eerily somehow communicated to it. *Is this what a chicken feels?* And a moment of horror, wondering how long one must endure this "*this*." Followed by oblivion.

Oblivion of course, for D'Antoine the atheist had reckoned on nothing. And here nothing was. All senses gone. The void. Blackness not even black, silence not even silence. Sans all.

There is a certain smugness attached to finding oneself perfectly right, even if one can no longer experience it.

Héros, who had been dispatched a short while before, was experiencing something similar.



In his case, the passage of the blade had been sheer. To use the analogy of hot knives through butter is in bad taste, but there. It is the best one. Stunned, Héros lost consciousness instantly. He may have expected to. When he opened his eyes again, everything was altered but still he saw only what he expected.

The way to Hell was gaudy, festive almost; the lighting, to say the least, theatrical. Flames leaped crimson on the subterranean cliffs that lined the path, and a grotesquerie of shadows danced with them. Héros was, on some unrecognised level, gratified to see that it had all the artistry of a good painting of the subject. Indeed, some of it was so familiar that it filled him with a slight sense of *déjà vu*. Presently a masked devil swooped down at him on bat-wings, with a shriek. Héros, unprotesting, elegant, moved towards his punishment.

The bright entrance and the gradients beyond were littered by howling, pleading, rioting or bravely-joking damned. Among them he caught sight of certain prior acquaintances, just those he would, in fact, have anticipated. He also partly expected to see D'Antoine arrive at any moment, ushered in behind him. D'Antoine, who had led a magnificently licentious life, had believed that only oblivion followed death. His friend would have been interested to see D'Antoine's face when he discovered he was wrong. On the whole, Héros did not think Lucien would make up the party. Although Lucien had done a thing or two that would doubtless disqualify him from eternal bliss, he had a sort of faun-like innocence that would probably keep him out of the ultimate basement area.

Occasionally goaded, though never prodded, by appalling devils, Héros walked on and found himself at length in a sort of waiting-room with broad open windows. These gazed out across incendiary lakes and lagoons, and mountains of anguished structure. Actual torments were visible from here, but, being in the distance, not very coherently. It was a subtle arrangement, threatening, but restrained. If questioned, Héros would have confessed that he approved of it. At a stone table in the waiting-room, a veiled figure sat dealing cards. Héros, who had been inclined to cards in life, sat down opposite and, without a word, they began to play a hand.

The game seemed to last a very long time. An extraordinarily long time. Abruptly, Héros came to from a kind of daze, and with a strange feeling to which he could assign no name — for he felt, absurdly, almost guilty. It appeared to him at that moment as if, rather than being kept waiting here, most cruelly, to learn his exact awful fate, he *himself* — but no, that was plainly ridiculous. Just precisely then, a tall flame burst through one of the windows, and out of the flame a demon stared at him with a cat's wild eyes. Beckoned, somewhat relieved, Héros abandoned the cards, and went towards the demon, which suddenly grasped him and bore him out into the savage landscape beyond the room. A backward glance showed the veiled figure had disappeared entirely.



They did not exchange small-talk, the demon and Héros. Hell spoke for itself. They passed over laval cauldrons in which figures swam and wailed, and over emaciated moaning forms chained to the sides of mountains and tormented by various . . . *things*. Others of the condemned crawled about at the edges of retreating pools, croaking of thirst. Some toiled like ants, great boulders on their backs. Still others were being flayed or devoured by fiends, from the feet up. Allusions both historic and classical were nicely mingled. There was something in a dreadful way reassuring about it all.

At length, the demon chose to hover in mid-air close to a weird contraption, a kind of swing. Back and back it flung itself, then forth and forth, with a tireless pendulum motion, until about a mile away it plunged into a torrent of fire, and far off screaming was detectable. But now it was swinging back again. Seated in a froth of summery dresses — the height of Revolutionary French fashion — two young women, quite unscathed, toasted each other in white sparkling wine.

As they drew nearer, Héros noticed that there was room on the swing for one more person. Just then, the blonder of the two ladies glanced up and beheld him.

"Why, it's Héros — Héros!" she cried; the darker girl joined in with: "We saved a place for you, Héros darling."

Héros smiled and greeted them. Both looked familiar, although he was not sure from where. Instead, each of them seemed like an amalgam of certain aspects of all the women he had known, the dark and the blonde, the coarse and the refined, aristo and plebeian — delightful. And no sooner had he concluded this, than his demon escort dropped him. There was no sensation of falling. One moment he was in the air, next moment in mid-flight on the swing, a girl either side, soft arms, warm lips, curly hair, and very good champagne being held for him to drink. "Knock it back quickly, lovely Héros. In a minute, we'll be into *that* again."

"The fire?" queried Héros. The swing had reached its furthest backward extent, paused, and now began once more to fly forward.

"Oh the fire. The pain! The terror!"

"But it only lasts a moment," said her friend and, indeed, his.

"You get used to it."

They toasted the monarchy, something it had long since ceased to be sensible to do upstairs. Then they embraced.

The swing was broad and comfortable enough for almost . . . anything.

After a few extremely pleasant minutes, his two companions clutched at him with exclamations of fright, and boiling red flames enveloped them. They all screamed with pain. Then the swing rushed out again and the pain vanished. They had not been burned, not even blistered. The champagne too retained its refreshing coolness, nor had any of it evaporated.

Héros relaxed amid the willing human cushions. Three seconds of agony, against several minutes that were not agonising at all, seemed an excellent

arrangement. Of course one suffered. One was supposed to. But the ratio could only be described as — civilised.

The next time they went into the fire they were all singing a very lewd song of the proposed Republic. They screamed briefly, though in perfect tempo, and came out again on the succeeding verse.

In perfect tempo too, Lucien felt the pain of the guillotine's blade. It was swift and stinging, not unendurable, leaving an afterimage of itself that grew in intensity, not to greater pain but to a terrible struggle. Physically the guillotine had deprived him of sight, hearing and speech — but not totally of feeling. He hung there, formless, and for a long ghastly eternity fought to breathe, tried to swallow, and most of all to cry out.

When he broke from this, he did not know where he was, but that he was somewhere seemed self-evident. Still blind and deaf and dumb, he had convinced himself that he was now breathing, and because of this thought that he had somehow been rescued by the crowd, who must have pulled him clear of the crashing blade — by unimaginable means — at the last moment. But of course, there was no one near him, nothing. When he attempted to reach out, his hands found only emptiness, and besides, they were not hands. All *that* was done with. His body had been lost. Only he remained. And for a horrible second he was not even sure of that. But he held to himself grimly, to everything he could remember. This was the second struggle, and in the middle of it he managed to open his eyes; or, at least, he began to see.

What he saw was not encouraging. It was truly a scene of total emptiness, a skyless desert made solely of the absence of things, and yet there seemed to be matter in it. For example, to stare at something was to produce a sort of illusory smoky shape. And then again, there was nothing to be stared at in the first place. His feeling now was of depression, a fear and misery he had never known to such a degree even on the volatile emotional see-saw of his life. And of loneliness, which was the worst of all.

Somehow he had survived death. Or had he? This seemed the most tenuous and precarious of survivals. *Limbo* was the notion that came to mind. If he still possessed a mind.

He found that he looked ceaselessly in all directions, but all directions were the same. He was searching for a method of escape, or a mode of return. His life was precious to him. He longed for it. He wanted to go back! There must be some way — And when this passionate yearning grew very strong, out of his confusion the desert seemed to fill with crowds and colour and noise. He was in a procession on horseback, or else watching one from the roadside. He heard the cannon booming over Paris on the day the Bastille fell; he heard — but these were only waking dreams. With an effort, each time he shook them off. The door to release was not to be found in this way.

It seemed then he rummaged about in the emptiness, or maybe hurried over it, or dug through it, all to no avail. And then, when he stopped, his thoughts grew very still and began gently to flow out from him. He was afraid to lose them, and himself. This fear was more dreadful than any of the others, more dreadful even than the fear of death had been.

There was anger too. None of this was what Lucien had believed would greet the "immortal" soul. It was demonstrably useless to call on God. (He had done so.) Either God did not exist, or did not attend. There were also curious moments when it seemed to him that he, not God, had the key to all of this. But how could that be so?

Perched there in the depths of the waste, he huddled memories about him, warming himself at the recollections of beautiful Lucette, and crying over his child, or thinking that he cried. But the loneliness pressed down on him like an inexorable coffin-lid. Though he supposed he could people the colourless greyness, that was not even grey, with the figures of wife and friends, or with anything, he knew such toys were false, and useless.

Was everything he now experienced a punishment? Not the ridiculous Catholic Hell, but some more deadly state where he must wander for ever, weighted by depression, alone, until his own self was worn away as time washes smooth a stone? Lucette — Lucette —

Lucette, desiring her freedom so much, was already partly out of her body as the blade fell. She heard and felt the stroke, but from some way off. Then the multitude, the blood-soaked guillotine, all Paris, the very world, dashed away beneath her. She rose into a sky almost cloudless and utterly blue. Whole and laughing and lovely, she entered Heaven with the lightest step, in her white dress, her hair already long again.

It was all so beautiful. It was as she had dreamed of it when a child. Balanced on their clouds of cirrus the streets of gold, the pearly dazzling palaces, the handsome people smiling and brave, the little animals that made free of every step and cornice, the birds and the kind angels that flew overhead, about the level of the fourth floor windows . . . She ran along, crying with pleasure, at every crossroads expecting to meet Lucien — probably sitting writing something, and so engrossed, he had momentarily forgotten the time of her arrival. But she did not find him. And at last, there in the golden sunlight of endless day, Lucette paused.

A stately woman in white robes came down the boulevard, and Lucette approached her.

"Madame, excuse me, but I should like to ask your advice." The woman looked at her, gently smiling. "I'm searching for my husband. He died some days ago, and I expected he would be here before me —" the woman went on smiling. "Madame — I can't find him."

"Then perhaps he is not here."

"There is nowhere else he could be," said Lucette firmly.

"Ah, my dear, there are numerous other places. He could be in any one of them."

Lucette frowned and her fine eyes flashed. Was this woman daring to suggest —?

"Where?" said Lucette. It was a challenge. One did not live next to a fighter such as Lucien without some of the trade-marks rubbing off.

But, enigmatically, the woman only said, "Seek and ye shall find." And so passed on down the street.

Lucette sat under a portico to pet a pair of white rabbits. She told them about Lucien, and once about the child they had had to leave behind them, and then she wept. The rabbits were patient, and dried her tears on their fur.

Eventually Lucette rose and went on alone, determined to search every street and park, every room and cupboard of Heaven. She did so. Up stairs she hurried, over bridges under which ran the sapphire streams of Paradise, scattered with flowers and ducks. Into high bell-towers she went, and from the tallest roofs of all she gazed into rosy distances, between the flight-paths of the angels. She did not grow tired. There could be no tiredness. But she grew unsure, she grew uneasy. Now and then she asked someone, once she even asked an angel, who stood calmly on a pillar some feet over her head. But no one could aid her. Lucien? Who was Lucien? She was accustomed, was Lucette, to being married to a famous man. It added to her sense of outrage and sadness that they did not know him.

Though there was no time, yet her search of Heaven took a lot of it. In the end, it seemed to her she had visited every inch.

Finally she sought a gate, and walked out of it into the clouds. She turned her back on Bliss. It was not bliss, if her love was not to be there with her.

An infinity of sky stretched away and away. Lucette moved across it, still searching, and the glow of the ethereal city faded behind her. Like an . . . illusion.

On the astral plain, though illusions may be frequent, one does not sleep, let alone turn in one's sleep; neither does one do so in annihilation. Nevertheless, in a manner of speaking, D'Antoine did "turn" in his "sleep."

It was as if, determined to wake up at a particular hour, he now partly surfaced from deep slumber to ask himself, drowsily, unwillingly, *Is it time, yet?* But apparently it was not yet time. With a — metaphorical — grunt, the Lion who no longer remembered he had been the Lion, sank down once more into the cosy arms of oblivion, burrowed, nestled, and was gone again.

The demon whose turn it was on the spit with Héros stared at him quizzically.

"Don't you find all this," said the demon, "a bit samey?"

"Being tortured, do you mean? I suppose, as torturer, *you* might find it

so. We can swap places if you like.”

“You miss the point,” said the demon.

Héros eyed the demon’s pitchfork.

“Not always.”

As it had turned out, the lascivious fiery swing was not the only appliance to which Héros had been subjected. He had suffered many more stringent punishments. Although, strangely enough, only when he himself began to consider the lack of them. But doubtless that was merely the prescience of guilt. Strangely too, more strangely in fact, even the worst of the tortures seemed rather hollow. This one, for example, of being slowly roasted alive, stabbed the while at suitable junctures by the pitchfork — somehow it was difficult to retain the sense of agony. One’s mind unaccountably wandered. One had to *remember* to writhe. It was not that it did not hurt. It hurt abominably. And yet —

“I apologise,” said Héros, “if I don’t seem properly attentive. No fault of yours, I assure you.”

“Perhaps,” said the demon, “yours?”

“Oh, undoubtedly mine.”

“Perhaps,” said the demon, “you shouldn’t be here.”

The spit had stopped revolving. The roasting flames grew pale.

“I can’t think where else.”

“Try,” said the demon.

Héros frowned. Now one thought of it, this was the first occasion one of the minions of Hell had held a conversation with one. Since his bonds had disappeared, Héros sat up and looked about him. Hell seemed oddly inactive, and dull, as if it were cooling down, a truly appalling idea. Weary spirals of old smoke, as if from something as mundane as burnt pastry, crawled upwards from the cold grey obsidian rocks. Nothing else moved. When Héros turned to the communicative demon, it too was gone.

The fires of Hell went out, and Héros sat alone there. No friend, no enemy, for whom to exhibit courage, no audience for whom to shine.

After a long time, a feeling of discomfort, *spiritual* malaise, drove him to his feet. He walked along the shelving greynesses, searching for something, unable to realize what. And as he did so he ceased to walk, began simply to progress.

Calm arrived suddenly. It was like letting drop a ton weight you had been holding on to for years; it was wonderful. And almost immediately on the lightening and the calm, began a quickening of interest, a dramatic, pervasive excitement —

Lucien started up — and in that instant was aware he was no longer Lucien, was no longer even *he* — and that it did not matter. That it was, actually, a great relief.

Simultaneously all the greyness went away. The desert went. Instead . . . Here one is presented with the problem of describing a rainbow to those

blind from birth, when one is, additionally, oneself as blind. But there is that marvellous beast again, the analogy. Analogously, then. The small bit of psychic fibre which had been, a few seconds or years ago, the young man Lucien, passionate revolutionary, first-class writer, fairly consistent hysteric, and post guillotinee, was all at once catapulted out of its self-constructed prison of terrors and miseries, into a garden of sun and flowers and birdsong. No, not Heaven. But so glorious the garden was, and limitless, it would have put Heaven to shame. And over there were mountains to be climbed, and over there seas to be swum, and up there, a library of wisdom with wide-open doors. And most charming of all, drifting here and there in earnest discussion with each other, or merely quietly reposing together, or quite alone yet *still* together — others, who were family and friends, thousands of them, the closest and the best; old rivals to be tussled with, familiar loves to be embraced. And embuing it all a spirit of gladsome and determined, ferocious curiosity. Of course, it was not like this. Not at all. Yet, it was. Suffice it to say that the soul which had last been Lucien dashed into it with the psychic equivalent to a howl of joy, and was welcomed. And here is one more analogy. Imagine you were rendered voluntarily amnesiac, (absurd, but imagine it), and came to believe you were a small wooden post located in a cellar. And as the time went by, you saw the advantages of being a small wooden post, began, adaptable creature that you were, to like it, and so to *dislike* the idea of being anything else. And then the cellar door opened. And then the amnesia lifted.

Somewhere on the edges of the analogous garden, the soul that had been Lucien met the soul that had been peerless, assured Héros, entering in a bemused, nervous sort of way. And the two souls greeted each other and reassured each other that everything was all right, before dashing off to discover all the things they were now so eager to find out about.

While somewhere close by, close as the bark to the inside of a tree, yet totally distanced, D'Antoine "turned" again in his "sleep," muttered something, metaphorically, and nodded off into oblivion once more.

That oblivion of his was turning out rather easy. Had she known, Lucette might have envied it. But as it was, her own sleepless journey reminded her of the tasks of Psyche in the Greek myth, a story Lucien had once told her at the Luxembourg Gardens, and which had retained for her ever after the shattering poignancy of that time. In this way, it sometimes seemed a malign fate, even a malign goddess, hindered her.

Sometimes, the perimeter of her vision conveyed the image of a flock of fierce golden sheep with terrible teeth, or else she seemed to be kneeling, sorting grains on the ground. Eventually, she toiled with a pitcher up a steep featureless hill. The sky was misty now, no longer blue but a colourless almost-grey. She too had entered the region of *limbo*, though she did not know it. She did know she must fill the pitcher at the black stream of Lethe, which brought forgetfulness, which, in effect, took all awareness of self

away. Only by filling the pitcher, fulfilling the task, could she ever hope to find Lucien.

Unlike the myth, there was no opposition at the stream. As she bent towards the water, Lucette saw her reflection, just as she had seen it, living, in so many mirrors, even in a mirror that had also, once, reflected the face of Marie Antoinette. And in that moment, Lucette felt a pang of compassion for all lovely young discarded bodies, the white skin, the sunlit hair — for they were of no more use, nor hers to her, and now she understood as much. *Next time*, she thought. But, *next time*, what? Then, letting fall the pitcher, and letting it vanish too, she lifted a handful of the black water of forgetfulness, and with a last wistful thought of love, she drank it.

The incorporeal state did not seem quite right to the one who had been Lucette. She — it — was young, yet old enough that intimations reached through of one day when incorporeality would seem pleasant and informative, and another day, centuries in the future, when incorporeality would be yearned for. Meanwhile, these conditions were imperfect, yet they were not, after all, alien. Then, the young soul advanced or circled or perhaps did not move at all, and in doing so found the soul which had been Lucien.

Though neither was as they had been, no longer Lucien, no longer Lucette, no longer male or female: even so, the aura of love and kindness they had shared still bonded them, attracted them both to the other's vicinity. But there were many such bonds now open to each of them. They came together now, and would come together often, and touch in the way souls do touch, which is naturally the rainbow and the blind again. But since there was no loneliness and no rejection and no anguish where now they were, they did not need to cling together, a single unit of two, against a hostile environment. For this environment was benign, and it and they were one.

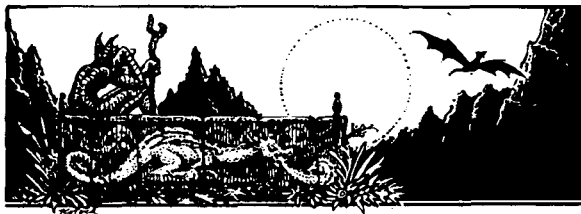
In this story, you see, the lovers do not join for ever to violin accompaniment on a cloud of mortal love. The lovers are no longer mortal, and there are no violins, no clouds. It is difficult not to experience annoyance or mournfulness, or even fear, that individual liaisons do not need to persist, in frantic intensity, *there*, where the love is all-pervasive, calm and unconditional. We must try not to lament or to be irritated by them. Only note how happy they are, even if "happy" is an analogous word.

While, somewhere close as a hand to a glove, D'Antoine "turns" over and finally wakes, and is no longer D'Antoine. The lengthy sleep of nothingness has acted like a sponge, and wiped away physical identity. Though the emerging soul remembers it, of course, as all of them remember who they have been, plan who they *will* be, (no unfinished business is ever left unfinished; there will be other work, other loves, other springs), it is now a garment held in the hands, not the substance of the self. The true self is quite



free. It leaps forward into liberty with an analogous roar of delight and resolution.

The resonance of such roars is a commonplace of the astral. Just as the sound of tears, the cry of pain, and the falling crash of the guillotine are a commonplace, here.



## LOVER AS VAMPIRE

When the willow stiffens with shadow  
And creatures emerge from the nest,  
You come with the moon through my window  
— the hard, cool moon and the mist.

Your fingers script my willing part;  
With smells of earth and oldness,  
You leave a trail of coldness  
While you slowly drink my heart.

— Wendy McElroy

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# BUCCANEER TREASURE

by Robert E. Howard

art: Roy G. Krenkel



This is a story that I heard from the lips of a drunken tramp  
Down by the wharfs in Mike's saloon, in the light of the smoky lamp.  
From his tousled hair his strange eyes stared, glimmering, shot with blood;  
His rags hung loose and his tattered shoes were caked with the wharfside  
mud.

With his twitching hands and his rasping laugh he gazed like an idol grim  
With a drunken leer o'er the stein of beer that I had bought for him.  
"Look here," said he, "I'll tell ye a tale — a story strange, d'ye hear?  
No man has heard it from me before; I've held it many a year.

"Some twenty years ago it was, I found myself a-float  
From the shattered deck of a fog-bound wreck, at sea in a sailless boat.  
Me and the mate — the other boats they lost us in the fog.  
Still was the day and dim and grey, the sea like curdled grog.

"The silence shuddered o'er the waves, we scarcely dared to speak.  
We might have rowed for half a day; it might have been a week.  
The mate had got the water-keg and kept it to his hand,  
A pistol resting on his knee to keep him in command.

"He sat unmoving in the bows, his gaze an insane stare.  
At first he'd let me have a drink and then he wouldn't share.  
I rowed until my strength gave out and as he sat he slept;  
I shipped the oars; as he dozed closer to him I crept.

"My thirst was like a raging fiend; I leaped with lifted knife;  
He woke — his pistol grabbed — too late; my dagger drank his life.  
I seized the keg — gods! it was good! — I guzzled long and deep,  
Then flung my victim overside, lay down and fell asleep.

"I might have slept for half a day, I might have slept a year,  
But when I woke the fog had broke, the sea was sapphire clear.  
The sea was clear and strange to me; it lay like a girl asleep.  
Though strange it be yet I could see uncounted fathoms deep.

"As I were mazed I lay and gazed through emerald depths untold.  
The eastern sky was rosy red, the sun was rising gold.  
The lazy waves they swung the bow with a gentle sway and lift.  
I laid the oars across the thwarts and the boat I let it drift.

"I watched and saw strange shadows stray for fathoms down below;  
Like shimmer, gossamer things of dreams I watched them come and go.  
And then sometimes, like fairy chimes or a golden Chinese gong,  
Strange music echoed across the sea like tones of a wordless song.

"Through the golden day as mazed I lay, like jade without a flaw,  
The sea lay clear to my wondering eyes and strange were the sights I saw.  
I gazed on wonders of ages gone as my boat went drifting o'er  
Gem-set towers and strange sea flowers a-bloom on the ocean floor.

"Galleys of cities long forgot, dragon-ships and triremes;  
Beneath the bows of my drifting boat they glided like hazy dreams.  
Spires and castles swam into view, lost cities met my glance  
And ever the shadows swayed and fled like things of a deep sea dance.

"At last I saw them plain and clear and I swear I do not lie!  
The shadows were mermaids, that I saw, beautiful, swift and shy.  
Their hair was wavy and long and gold, their bodies whiter than snow;  
Through the wondrous sheen of the ocean green they sported to and fro.

"The sun was close to the western sea when the fairest maid of the mer  
Swam by me, beckoning with her hand, and I set my course by her.  
I scarcely needed to touch an oar, in a merry laughing throng  
The sea-girls swarmed on every hand and hurried my boat along.

"The sun was touching the western sea, gold on a sea of blue,  
When riding the green waves motionless, a galley loomed to view.  
Barnacles crusted her ancient strakes, her tall mast held no sail;  
I found a rusty anchor chain and clambered across the rail.

"So ancient was she I gaped and gazed in wonder, craning my neck;  
Skeletons sat at the rotting oars and lay on the sun-warped deck.  
A steel-bound chest on the main bridge stood and a skeleton lay thereon.  
From the size of the bones he must have been a giant of thews and brawn.

"All in and out among his ribs the clinging sea moss twined  
And decked the bare, sea-rotting skull that once had held a mind.  
Those bones were old as Time itself, sun-warped, broken and grey.  
I flung them down upon the deck and the chest's lock pried away.

"But I knew by the sword cuts and the marks as I flung back the lid  
I had found the treasure that seamen seek, *the treasure of Captain Kidd!*  
Glimmers of diamonds met my eyes, rubies that shone like stars;  
Gleam and glitter of virgin gold, shimmer of silver bars.

"I thrust my hands in the kingly hoard where the doubloons rare lay  
massed —

When an icy breath like a thing of Death like a shadow whispered past.  
I turned me round, my eyes a-blink, half-blind from the treasure shine —  
The short hair prickled at my neck and a cold hand touched my spine.

"For I will swear that I saw there a sight to cool the blood,  
The skeleton like a living man before me rose and stood!  
His fleshless, toothless jawbones moved and yet he spoke no word,  
But they upon the deck uprose and the bones of the rowers stirred.

"The rotten oars began to creak and sway each in its groove,  
The arm bones creaked and bent and swayed — the galley began to move!  
The galley leaped like a fleeing deer, straight into the west she sped  
As the scarlet sun in a sea of blood sank with a blaze of red.

"The crimson waves cleft to her prow and in behind her spun.  
And I saw a world of lurid flames *behind the setting sun.*  
In wild amaze I watched them blaze, leap up and die and flare  
Beyond the rim of the fiery sea like things of a wild nightmare.

"No worldly fires could fling such flame and I knew what befell —  
As faster and faster the galley sped — *she was bearing me into Hell!*  
Shrieking I hurled me across the rail, I clambered into the boat,  
With shaking hands I loosed the chain and pushed her far afloat.

"But the galley altered not her pace, 'twas as she fled the night,  
Marvelling there I watched her fly, fast dwindling from my sight.  
Till far away like some foul bird she stood against the flare,  
Then vanished in the red sunset and Hell that waited there.  
The stars came blinking o'er the sea, slow came a slender moon,  
And I found that I clutched in my shaky hand a tarnished gold doubloon.

"The blue waves barely rocked the boat beneath the silver moon,  
All night she drifted with the tides as I lay half in a swoon.  
And sometimes 'tween the dusk and dawn, after the moon had slid  
Across the skyline, there came to me the ghost of Captain Kidd.

"He wore his pistols and great sea boots as when he trod the deck,  
But shackles clung to his hairy arms and the noose was on his neck.  
And he told me how, as a living man, he had sailed to unknown climes  
And had found that galley upon the sea, adrift since ancient times.

"And put thereon his chest of loot and a grisly bargain made  
With Satan himself, and with men's blood he sealed his part of the trade.  
And Satan guards his servant's gold with a magic grim and fell  
And none may seize that blood-stained loot lest they be hurled to Hell.  
From his bearded lips I had the tale, ere the weary stars had fled,  
And he faded like a wisp of smoke before the dawn broke red.

"How many days my boat did drift, I swear I cannot say,  
But I came to upon the deck of a trader from Bombay.  
I told them not my weird tale, they would have deemed me crazed.  
Indeed I scarce believed myself all was so strange and mazed.

"But sure it was no lunacy, no daftness of the moon,  
For in a pocket of my clothes I found a gold doubloon.  
For many a year I've sailed the seas, but nevermore have seen  
That frightful galley all afloat upon that sea of green.

"Around the world for twenty years I've sailed the driving brine,  
Some day I'll sight that ship again and her plunder will be mine.  
I'm weary, worn, bent by toil, I've neither wife nor friends,  
But never shall I quit the trails that lead to far sea ends.  
That treasure haunts my restless dreams; I see the gleaming hoard.  
A tramp? Ha! Ha! Some day I'll live like some blue-blooded lord."

This was the story that he told, that drunken, strange-eyed tramp  
And as he finished, a thing that gleamed in the light of the smoky lamp  
He laid upon the drink-stained bar. Before each curious stare  
A glittering thing of Spanish gold, a doubloon glinted there.



# The Observatory

by George H. Scithers

Yes, we're going to be a TV series. It happened like this:

A long time ago (16 August 1884; just a century ago, in fact), in a small country far, far away (the Grand Duchy of Luxemburg), Hugo Gernsback was born. He grew up; immigrated to the United States; founded and published various magazines; founded the radio station that became New York City's municipally-owned WNYC; coined the words *scientific*, *science fiction*, and even *television* — and founded the first science-fiction magazine in the world, then *Amazing Stories*, now *Amazing® Science Fiction Stories*, still being published after 520 issues and over 58 years.

In December of 1983, the present owners, TSR, Inc., received word from Susan Allison, the very capable science-fiction editor of the Berkley Publishing Group, that someone in Hollywood was looking for the owner of the trademarked title, *Amazing® Stories*. She put us in touch with Universal Studios, and soon we reached an agreement: we're renting the right to use the title *Amazing® Stories* (with or without the *Science Fiction*) for a TV series that Universal was thinking about.

Since so many TV projects never reach production, we had to be pre-

pared to see this one fade away.

Instead, on the 30th of July, 1984 (just 17 days short of Uncle Hugo's 100th birthday), Grant Tinker, Chairman of the National Broadcasting Company, and Sid Sheinberg, President of MCA, Inc., (which owns Universal Studios) announced, "Stephen Spielberg will be the Series Executive Producer of a new half-hour length TV series entitled *Amazing® Stories*." The series will begin in the Fall season of 1985; the agreement between MCA, Inc., and NBC apparently provides for 44 episodes — essentially two full seasons.

The length of the initial agreement is extraordinary; so is an announcement by the corporate heads rather than by programming executives, several tiers down the organization charts. Spielberg is director of *Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom*, of *E.T.*, and of the original *Jaws*. He began his professional career by directing an episode of "Night Gallery." Sheinberg originally brought Spielberg to Universal Television for that work. As executive producer, Spielberg may write or direct some episodes, but most will probably be written and directed by others under his general supervision.

Obviously, we're looking forward to the series; we'll bring you news of its development in the coming months. <





*The author reports that he was born in Silver Creek, "a somewhat uninspiring little town situated on the shores of Lake Erie," and has lived there all his life. His latest novel, The Last Yggdrasil, was published in May 1982 by Del Rey Books.*

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**MARS CHILD**  
by Robert F. Young  
art: Jack Gaughan



Our Mars child is a fourteen-year-old girl.  
In Mars years, she is little more than half that age.  
She is utterly beautiful.

Helen and I were sent holograms of her, of course, and we knew she would be beautiful, but she is the first Mars child we have seen in the flesh, and until this moment we did not realize how breath-taking true beauty can be.

We walk across the Americanization Center's waiting room to meet her. I am struck first of all by the blueness of her eyes. It is pure azure, but it is much too deep to be compared to Earth skies. Perhaps it is the blueness of Mars's skies as they were millions of years ago. She has dark-brown hair which dances in waves to her shoulders. The curvature of her nose is a gentle downward sweep from the curve of her eyebrows; it is as though an artist obsessed with beauty drew her face. Her skin is touched with gold from the summer sun. Her lips are quite full, but there is no hint of sensuality in them. She has a rounded, childlike chin.

Her name is Dawn. Ostensibly it is an American name. Actually, although it is spelled D-a-w-n on the adoption papers, it is merely the name her Mars name sounds most like.

The first thing we do after making her legally ours is to drive into Warren, Pa., which is near the Eastern Americanization Center, and buy her new clothes. After decades of jeans, dresses have come into their own again, and she looks charming in the gay blue summer outfit she chooses to wear in place of the standard gray blouse and slacks the Center provided her. Her feet in summer sandals are those of a prince's daughter.

Perhaps, millions of years ago, she *was* a prince's daughter.

But she is *my* daughter now.

"Shall we stop for a bite to eat?" I ask, as we leave the boutique.

"Are you hungry, Dawn?" Helen asks.

"Yes, kind of, Mrs. Fairfield."

"You mustn't call me 'Mrs. Fairfield,' Dawn. You may call me 'Helen' if you prefer that to 'Mother'."

"Don't American children call their mothers 'Mom'?"

I can see that Helen is pleased. She has dark-brown hair too, and blue eyes. Although her face is merely pretty, to the casual observer she could pass for Dawn's real mother. "I'd love to have you call me 'Mom'."

Dawn turns to me. "And shall I call you 'Dad'?"

I try to take this in my stride. It is difficult. We have wanted a child for so long that getting one almost hurts. "I hope you will, Sweetheart."

"I will then. Mom and Dad. You know, I guess I'm hungrier than I thought. We only had cereal for breakfast."

We climb back into my car. It is a new electricar that was made in this country from parts made overseas. This is as close to an American car as it

is possible to get. Helen lets Dawn have the front seat and sits in the back with the packages. I drive north out of Warren and stop at a pleasant roadside restaurant. It is past noon, but I am not very hungry, and Helen does not appear to be either. I guess we are too excited to eat. But our lovely young daughter makes up for our lack of appetite. The waitress keeps glancing at her, but I do not believe she guesses Dawn is one of the Mars children. The other customers keep stealing glances at our table. I am sure it is Dawn's beauty alone that is responsible for their interest. She has been so thoroughly Americanized, at least on the surface, that I doubt anyone could deduce her provenance.

I ask her if she would like another piece of pie. She says she doesn't think so, that she's full. "I guess we'll head for home then, Sweetheart."

"Okay, Dad."

She is all eyes as I drive northward on 62. The Centers, of course, provide excursions for the Mars kids while they are being Americanized and thought-taught, but in Dawn's case the excursions seem only to have added to her eagerness to see new sights and scenes. She looks at houses, fields, woods and little towns. In many of the fields, tomatoes are being picked; in others, cornstalks stand man-high. The leaves of the trees, this late in summer, have turned a darker green.

"Do you think you're going to like Earth?" I ask her.

"Earth is a beautiful planet."

"Yes, I guess it is. We've done everything in our power to make it ugly, but it thwarted us . . . Was Mars beautiful too?"

"Yes. It was quite beautiful."

I do not pursue the subject. At the Center they told us that Mars children do not like to talk about the way Mars was, long, long ago. This is understandable. I would not want to talk about Earth either, if Earth had died.

At length we enter New York State. "Soon you'll be going to school, Dawn," Helen says from the back seat. "Do you think you'll like it?"

"It'll be much different from the Center, won't it?"

"Yes, but a lot more fun. You'll meet all sorts of kids, and there'll be dances you can go to and games you can play. You'll be much freer than you were at the Center."

"I shall probably like it then."

It might seem that thought-teaching techniques would have eliminated the need for schools. But schools in America long ago came to be far more than mere citadels of learning; they became institutes for socialization. Thought-teaching may be able to educate a child over a brief period of time, but by its very nature it robs the child of a chance to socialize. On the other hand, when an American kid goes to school, he automatically enters and contributes to the thought world of his peers. He learns to act like them, to think like them and to talk like them, the while adding his

ounce of individuality to the pot. Thus, while the Centers are able almost overnight to educate the Mars children and to instill in them our *modus vivendi*, in-depth Americanization can be accomplished only by sending them to school. To this end, the adopter of a Mars child is required by law to enroll the adoptee in public school at a grade level suitable to the adoptee's age.

So Helen and I *have* to send Dawn to school.

I wonder what the American kids will do to her.

She seems delighted when she sees the special room we remodeled and furnished for her in the upstairs of our American Colonial. We have wanted a child for so long that perhaps we overdid. Everything in the room is brand new: the bed, the vanity, the bureau, the shag rug. We even bought a small lounge chair for her to sit in, and a portable 3V. In addition, we bought a small maple desk and placed upon it a brand new electric portable typewriter. It sits there beneath its transparent cover, its keys yearning for the touch of her fingertips. I spent a whole weekend painting the room. Helen chose pink for the walls and white for the ceiling. The pinkness of the walls lends the room a virginal air, a motif repeated by the rose-embroidered counterpane Helen bought for the bed. There are two windows, one looking out into the side yard, the other upon the expanse of lawn between the house and the street.

"We bought the typewriter in case you decided to take up typing in school," I tell my lovely young daughter.

"I learned how at the Center, Dad. Oh, it was just wonderful of you!"

She sits down at the desk, finds paper in the drawer and rolls a sheet of it into the machine. *Dawn Fairfield*, she types. *1101 Wisteria Drive, Greenview, NY.*

Helen and I tiptoe down the stairs.

Maybe, lodged in the genes of the American people, is the mass memory of the transport plane laden with Vietnamese children that crashed during the evacuation of Saigon. Maybe this is why almost all of us opened our arms to the decryonicized children of Mars.

But maybe we would have opened our arms anyway, not only because of the children's beauty but because in America youth is revered. These two factors alone might have caved in our ethnocentrism even if exhaustive examinations and extensive tests had not revealed that the Mars children are physically no different from us and are alien only in name.

And then, too, our hearts must have been touched because of the thousands of Mars children who perished in their cryonic tanks when the Martian winds, ages ago, broke through the sealed entrances of two of the tetrahedral pyramids and disrupted the cryonic controls.

Only the poor among us have remained untouched. The logistics involved in transporting the decryonicized children to Earth and in

establishing the Centers have staggered our economy, still stagger it, in fact, for the transport ships we built are incapable of carrying more than two hundred children at a time and the one bearing the last two hundred is still en route from Mars. Federal allocations to the states have been drastically cut and there are demonstrators in Washington who, among millions of others, have had their welfare checks slashed. The demonstrators walk day and night before the White House gate, carrying signs that ask, **What about OUR kids?**

During the long dead years when Clomiphrene therapy and HMG and HCG and bromocriptine failed to cure Helen's pill-induced infertility, I used to picture the way it would be if we had a son or a daughter, how he or she would see me from the doorway of our house when I arrived home from work and come running to meet me as I climbed out of the car. "Daddy, daddy! — you're home!"

All of us live in a world that hates hopes, that grinds dreams beneath its heel. Often even the smallest things we hope for, dream of, are thus summarily dispensed with. When a man dreams big, he is asking for pain. Nevertheless, I dreamed of a son or a daughter.

I did not really care which it was — just so he or she would be a child I could call my own. As Helen's infertility continued, we talked often of adopting a child. But we could never quite take the step till the Mars children came upon the scene. I am glad now that we did not. Only childless couples are eligible to adopt the children of Mars, and they are limited to only one. Moreover, they must take the next child on the list. Helen and I applied. It was a long, long wait, but now we have Dawn.

She is always there in the doorway or waiting in the front yard when I drive into the driveway after work, and she always comes running to meet me. "Daddy, Daddy! — you're home!" Yes, yes, my darling daughter — at last I am truly home.

The neighbors love Dawn. So do the neighborhood kids. It is impossible to look at her and not love her. We have told our parents about the adoption. Helen's live in West Virginia and we know they will be up to visit us soon. My parents operate a dairy farm near Wales Center. It is unlikely they will come to visit us. They were talked into becoming Jehovah's Witnesses when they were old enough to know better. Most churches and religious sects have bent over backwards in order to accept the Mars children, but the Jehovah's Witnesses simply have not been able to find a niche in their credo in which to place them, though no doubt they have tried. How, for instance, can the Mars children be fitted into the forces of good when they are not only outsiders, but *outside* outsiders? No, I do not think my parents will come to visit us.

My brother Horace and his wife and kids come to visit us, though. And

Helen's two spinster sisters. All are enchanted by Dawn.

We have premonitions when, after Labor Day, we enroll our darling daughter in school. It is a fine school; our School Board makes certain we get the best teachers that can be had. Now that drug use has been legalized, the thrill of breaking the law is no longer a factor, and in our school drug use poses no problem. But inevitably, the same little demon who dwells in run-of-the-mill schools also dwells in ours. His name is Sex, and he lurks in the lavatories and hides out under the classroom desks.

He is not a newcomer, of course. He has been dwelling in schools for decades out of mind. But he has grown bolder with the passage of the years.

I am told that obscenities within obscenities are written on school desks, but I have refused to accept them as the principal products of immature minds. They were not the principal product of my immature mind when I went to school, for desk-writing was in vogue, then, too — had been for many years. I may even have contributed to the graffiti myself, but if I did, my obscenities were probably naïve.

I regard such childish manifestations of the sex urge, even those that are scatological, as having largely been induced from without: by TV and the movies originally, and by 3V in my own day and age.

Nevertheless, the little demon Sex still lurks in the lavatories and hides out under the classroom desks, and our premonitions persist.

They prove to be groundless. School does not change Dawn: she remains her sweet, virginal self. A few slang phrases are added to her vocabulary, but her naïveté is not weighed down with so much as a hint of sophistication.

She begins going with a Mars boy.

Yes, there are other Mars children in our school. Not many, but a few. The boy she starts going with is about her own age. His name is Tim, and he has blue eyes like hers, although his hair is lighter. I think perhaps that what brought them together is the inability of the Mars children to succeed in the more strenuous sports. Earth is the villain in this instance. Tim would be hopeless on a football field, and Dawn would never make a volleyball team. This shared weakness may have attracted them to each other. And then again, perhaps they knew each other on Mars, or possibly in the Center. I do not ask her, because it does not matter. I know that someday I shall have to give her up, and I would as soon it were to a Mars boy as to an American. But I am making distinctions that do not exist, because both Dawn and Tim *are* Americans — naturalized Americans, but Americans withal. And I am also being absurd, because I shall



not have to give her up for a long, long time, and even then, not altogether.

Sometimes, looking into Dawn's eyes, I try to picture the Mars skies as they were all those millions of years ago when the Mars people, foreseeing the ice age that would wipe out all life on the planet, built the indestructible three-sided pyramids in Elysium in which to entomb their children in cryonic tanks on the chance that in the future an extra-Martian race might find and decryonicize them and take them into its arms. But when I look into her eyes for any length of time I become absorbed by the eyes themselves. They are a deep, still blue, but they possess an odd translucence through which you can glimpse undercurrents of thoughts at odds with their placid surface. What kind of thoughts are they, I often wonder, and why are they never allowed to break free?

One evening, Helen says, "Mom called this afternoon. She and Dad are coming up for the weekend. They're dying to see Dawn."

"I thought they'd be up long before this."

"They would have, but Dad's been working weekends. They're real busy at the plant. They wanted to come up over Labor Day, but he had to work Labor Day, too. Double time."

"He'll work himself into the grave."

"He wants to make all he can. He's going to retire next year."

"Retire and play golf."

"What's wrong with playing golf?"

"That's what they all do."

"That's what you'll do, too, when you retire, I'll bet."

"I hope not. But it's too faraway to even think about."

But she is probably right. What else is there for old people to do besides play golf? Except eat and sleep and watch 3V.

Her parents arrive late Friday night. Dawn has already gone to bed. I can see they are tired from the long drive. My father-in-law is tall and thin, but he is developing a potbelly. His name is George. He is a toolmaker and has been working in the same place for almost forty years. My mother-in-law is short and dumpy. Her name is Grace. Helen inherited her father's tallness, and her features are much like his. I often wonder why I do not like him when I am in love with his daughter.

He and I have beer in the kitchen; Helen and her mother, coffee. I am not ordinarily a beer drinker, but when George is around I drink it to be companionable. He is twenty, perhaps thirty, years behind the times, but he tries to be modern. He has been reading up on the Mars children, probably in the *Reader's Digest*. "They estimate those kids were in cold storage for twenty million years," he says.

"All such estimates," I tell him, "are a wild guess."

But he has been sold on twenty million years. "How in Hell could they have built buildings that would last twenty million years? How in Hell could they have made cryonic tanks that wouldn't leak in all that time?"

"You're talking about technologists that make us look like a bunch of chicken-wire mechanics."

"What I don't understand is, if they were so smart, why didn't they invent space travel like we did? Then they just could of moved to another star when the ice age came."

"Didn't the *Reader's Digest* article explain why?"

"How'd you know I'd been reading the *Reader's Digest*?"

I refrain from telling him that, other than newspapers, the *Reader's Digest* is the only publication people like him ever read. "They probably did invent space travel. But where were they to go with their ships? All of those millions of years ago — and I'm talking about sixty, seventy or eighty, not twenty — Earth was a hostile place, and all the seven other planets were dead, just as they are today. That left them the stars. Alpha Centauri A, B, and C are the nearest, and they're 4.3 light years away. If the spaceships could have traveled at twelve percent the speed of light, the flight time one way would have been something like thirty-eight years. But we don't know whether any of the Centauri stars have planets and probably they didn't either. So even assuming they could have built enough ships to transport the whole of their civilization 4.3 light years, what good would it have done if there hadn't been a livable planet to land on? What they finally decided to do was the only sensible thing they could have done: they decided to try to save their children."

"Well they didn't save all of them. The article says they must have drawn the line and let those under five and those over sixteen die with the rest of the race."

"Probably they had to. Probably there wasn't enough space."

"It seems they could have saved the babies," my mother-in-law says.

"I doubt that a baby could survive cryonicization."

"What does Dawn say about it?" my father-in-law asks.

"Nothing, and we don't ask her. The Center made it clear the Mars kids shouldn't be asked questions about the past. They don't want to talk about it."

"That's funny, if you ask me."

"There's nothing funny about it," Helen says. "If the American race had been destroyed and you were one of the few survivors, would you want to talk about it?"

"I just can't wait to see her," my mother-in-law says. "Do you think, Helen, that I could peek in on her before I go to bed?"

"Sure, Mom."

"I should think it would kind of get on your nerves, having an alien in your house," my father-in-law says.

Sooner or later, he always makes me mad. "She's not an alien! She's a naturalized American!"

Helen is angry too. "She was never an alien in the first place! God put the same kind of people on Mars that He put on Earth. Most all of the churches are agreed on that."

"Then why don't the kids say 'God' instead of 'The Ku?' " my father-in-law asks.

"It's the same concept," I tell him. "They merely think of God as being an extra-galactic, vastly superior race of intelligent beings who seed planets with life."

"It doesn't sound like the same concept to me."

"Come on, George, let's go to bed," my mother-in-law says. "You can't talk two minutes without getting into an argument!"

My father-in-law finishes his beer and stands up. "The Ku," he grunts. "They sure don't sound like God to me."

(I have doubts about the Ku too, but all the doubts in the world cannot change the fact that an exterior force of some kind — God or the Ku — had to be at work in order for human beings to be present, even at widely different intervals of time, on both Earth and Mars.)

Whatever misgivings my father-in-law may have had are eclipsed the following morning when he sees Dawn. I guess he wanted a grandchild as much as Helen and I wanted a child. He is awed by the one he got.

My mother-in-law, who was awed when she peeked at her in bed, is awed again when she walks into the kitchen.

Their awe turns to love when she bestows a kiss on each of their faces and says, "Hi, Grandma. Hi, Grandpa."

They leave late Sunday afternoon, the richer for their darling granddaughter.

I wonder if I should take Dawn to visit my parents. I decide they are too deeply entrenched for Armageddon for her to be able to break through their defenses.

It is announced over 3V that the last of the Mars children have arrived at the space station and are being shuttled down to the various Centers. No new applications for adoption are being accepted because of the backlog that has built up. The INS has petitioned Congress for additional appropriations. In Washington, three of the anti-Mars children demonstrators are arrested for throwing I.U.D.s and packages of condoms on the White House lawn. The demonstrators' signs now read, **Birth Control is a Farce!**

We invite Dawn's boyfriend to dinner. His eyes have undercurrents of

thoughts too. Neither child mentions Mars; they talk instead of doings at school. Perhaps they might reminisce if Helen and I were not present. I ask Tim what he is going to be when he grows up. He does not have a ready answer; it is as though he has never given the matter any thought.

After it grows dark outside, he and Dawn go out into the backyard. Looking through the kitchen window, I see them walking hand in hand in the starlight. They come to a halt at the hedge that borders the back of our lot, and they stand there looking up at the sky. Perhaps they are looking at Mars. I expect them momentarily to turn toward each other and kiss, but they do not.

Presently they turn and face the house. I do not move from the kitchen window because the light is off and they cannot see me. I find it odd that despite the distance between us I can see their eyes. How blue they are! The blueness seems to incandesce, to stab at me out of the darkness; and I step involuntarily back from the window. Then I realize that the two children cannot possibly have been looking at me, that the house is the sole object of their gaze.

I step back to the window. They are no longer looking at the house, they have left the hedge and are walking toward the gazebo we built several summers ago to embellish our backyard. They step inside, and through the lattice walls I see them sit down on one of the benches. Surely they will kiss now. They do not. Perhaps they have not been thoroughly Americanized yet. Perhaps the little demon who lurks in school lavatories and who hides underneath school desks has thus far found them immune to his importunities. Perhaps on Mars promiscuity was frowned upon to such an extent that it became an aversion — an antipathy which even in-depth Americanization will never be able to wash away.

I leave the kitchen and go into the living room where Helen is watching 3V. I sit down beside her on the sofa.

How much do we really know about our darling daughter?

One afternoon after I arrive home from work and Dawn and I walk hand in hand into the house, I can tell instantly from the look Helen gives me and from her too mechanical kiss that something is wrong. But I pretend not to notice, and later on, during dinner, I refrain from asking her why she is so quiet. If something really is wrong, there is no reason to worry Dawn about it.

It is Friday, and there is a disco dance at the school. Dawn and Tim are going to it, and I wait till after she leaves with him before I corner Helen. But there is no need to corner her, because she has been waiting too. She gets her oversized purse from the hall closet, brings it into the living room and withdraws several sheets of 8½ x 11 typing paper which are paper-clipped together. A manuscript. "Dawn's English teacher held a short story contest."

I am not surprised. Most English teachers have the notion they are keen judges of the short story and like to exercise their *soi-disant* literary acumen. "Is that Dawn's you've got there? Why didn't she turn it in?"

"She did turn it in. This morning her teacher called me and asked if I could stop in and see her at one o'clock. She showed it to me and asked me to read it."

"What did Dawn think? Seeing you in school?"

"She didn't see me. Miss Laucello had a free period and we met in the Faculty Room."

"Pretty sneaky."

"No, it wasn't sneaky. Miss Laucello thought it would be better if Dawn didn't know her story had upset anyone."

"How could a short story written by a fourteen-year-old girl upset anyone?"

Helen hands me the manuscript. Her hands are trembling. "After I read it, I asked Miss Laucello if I could bring it home so you could read it too."

The story is typewritten. Dawn probably typed it on her new machine. I glance at the title and byline. *Mr. and Mrs. Neanderthaler, by Dawn Fairfield*. It pleases me to see her name joined with mine. The Mars children do not have last names of their own, or if they have, they have never revealed them. "It's a clever title. It captures the reader's attention right away."

"Please read it, Herb."

"I am reading it."

Once upon a time there was a time warp and a little girl named Sue got caught in it. Time is a funny thing. Sometimes when you think you're going ahead in it you're really going back in it. This was what happened to Sue. She thought for sure she would wind up in a glorious future, but instead she wound up in an inglorious past. At first she couldn't believe her eyes when she found herself among the Neanderthalers.

The whole tribe was bewitched by her beauty, and its members set about teaching her Neanderthaloid ways. All of the mothers and fathers wanted to adopt her, but of course the chief won out, and he and his wife took her to live with them in their cave. They hadn't any children of their own, and were delighted at last to get one.

She hated her new parents, but she realized they meant her no harm, that in their Pleistocene way they loved her and wanted her to be like them. So she decided to cooperate. She really didn't have much choice, since their language was so simplistic she couldn't impart to them any civilized ideas.

Presently Sue discovered that she wasn't the only modern child to have been caught in the time warp, that many others had been whisked back

into the past too, and were being indoctrinated by the tribe. Some of them, like her, had already been adopted. She didn't feel quite so alone then, because now she had someone she could talk to. It was weary trying to talk to the Neanderthaloid children. All of them were nerds, and sexual weirdos as well.

By common consent, however, Sue and all the other modern children became Neanderthals on the surface. They learned how to eat with their fingers and how to devour raw meat. But it was hard on them, though — especially Sue — when someone died and they had to partake of his or her brains.

Some of the modern girls and boys started going together, and the Neanderthals thought this was quite quaint. Sue began going with a modern boy named Bud. When she and Bud were together they talked about the future, but they didn't talk about it nostalgically because they knew better than to be homesick, they merely used it as a sort of yardstick by which to measure the age they were now living in. Beneath their troglodytic exteriors hatred held sway, and their measuring device served to make it incandescent. They hated everything about their new way of life, and they particularly hated the caves they had to live in. Eventually the caves came to epitomize everything they despised, and what made the caves more despicable yet was the smug attitude of their owners. Each owner thought his cave was better than his neighbors', and the way the chief acted you'd have thought his cave was a palace.

The day came when Sue and Bud decided they had to vent their frustration in some manner, otherwise they would go crazy, and since the caves were Number One on their Hate List, Bud said he thought they should blow them up, one at a time.

"But there isn't any blasting powder," Sue said.

"No problem there. We'll simply make some."

"When we blow them up, are we going to do it when the Neanderthals are inside?" Sue asked laughingly.

"Of course. We'll do it at night when they're asleep."

"Maybe we should give them some kind of warning."

"We will. One warning per family. The dumb fuzznuts won't believe us, but at least our consciences will be clear."

"I'll warn my 'mother' and 'father' first — okay?"

"Okay," Bud said.

So Sue warned her mother and father, but naturally they didn't believe her, and then she and Bud made powder out of potassium nitrate, charcoal and sulfur, and the fun began. Bud's parents' cave was the first to go, with his "mother" and "father" in it, even though he'd warned them, or said he had. The other Neanderthals pretended to be horrified, but they weren't really, because now Bud was available for someone else to adopt.

They began blowing up other caves with the Neanderthals in them, and soon the trend caught on and the other modern children began blowing up caves too.

The dumb Neanderthals never tumbled to what was really going on and thought the Thunder God was picking on them. They began holding rituals during which they beseeched him to vent his anger elsewhere. The modern kids laughed and laughed and laughed.

Sue could hardly wait to blow up her "parents' " cave, but she held off for a long while because she liked to see them gape when their neighbors' caves blew up. At last her impatience caught up with her and she set the charge one night when they were sound asleep and blew them and their scroungy cave to smithereens.

After a while there were no more adult Neanderthals left in the tribe. The few Neanderthaloid kids who had survived walked around with their mouths open and soon were eaten up by saber-toothed tigers. The modern kids found other caves to live in — big, elaborate ones — and began a better way of life. Centuries later, they acquired the name of Cro-Magnon from remains found in a cave near Périgueux, France. They painted bison on their caves' walls so their dwelling places would be pleasing to the eye, and they did such a good job that Picasso, many centuries afterward, admired their art.

After I finish reading the story I sit silently for a long while, staring at the last page. Helen becomes impatient. "Well?"

I flip the pages back to page one. "Miss Laucello forgot to grade it."

"Why should she grade it if it's part of a short story contest?"

"It deserves at least an A."

"I think the story is horrifying."

"What you're really thinking is that it's an allegory."

"Isn't it?"

"Helen, do you honestly believe that Dawn regards the United States as a tribe of Neanderthals?"

Helen lowers her eyes to her hands. They are clasped tightly on her lap. "I — I don't know."

"Does Miss Laucello?"

"She didn't say. All she said was that the story had upset her and that she thought I ought to read it."

"Why should it have upset her?" I demand. "What did she expect Dawn to write about? How she spent her summer vacation? How she lost her cat one time and then found it? Do you know what's wrong with English teachers, Helen? They think they have the God-given right to make judgments in a field they've viewed only from the outside. They set themselves up as literary connoisseurs in their classrooms, and they wouldn't know a good short story from a can of beans! And in this case, what happens? A story comes along that's altogether different from the



ones the other kids wrote, and instead of being pleased to run across something original for a change, the teacher's upset!"

"Stop shouting, Herb!"

"I'm sorry. I didn't know I was shouting."

"I'll take the story back to Miss Laucello, Monday."

"No you won't. I'm going to keep it."

"But it's part of the short story contest. She has to have it."

"She's probably judged it already."

"But what if Dawn won?"

"Don't be ridiculous, Helen!"

"Miss Laucello will insist that we return it."

"If she does, tell her to call me at my office."

"You'd like that, wouldn't you?"

"She needs straightening out."

"I still think the story is horrifying and I can't imagine why you want to keep it."

"Well I'm going to keep it, and that's all there is to it! Why don't you turn on 3V? There's a documentary on Channel 51 about a new electric car the Japanese are building."

I do not sleep well that night. I keep waking up again and again. And every time I wake up I see Dawn and Tim through the kitchen window with their incandescent blue eyes fixed upon the house.

The President makes a long speech tonight about the Mars children. "Almost all of them," he says, "are already safe and sound in the homes of fine, upstanding citizens, and the more recent arrivals soon will be. America, once again, has flung wide her doors to those in need, and taken them to her breast."

"Daddy, daddy! — you're home!" Dawn cries as she comes running to meet me. She jumps up and kisses me on the cheek, and we walk hand in hand into the house. My darling daughter and I.

One night, the fire whistle awakes me. I count the number of blasts to find out if the fire is in our section of Greenview. It is not. The blasts do not awaken Helen — they are not loud, for the Fire House is distant from our street. Presently they cease and I fall at once back to sleep. In the morning we hear on the local news that that Halsey house burned down and that Mr. and Mrs. Halsey died of smoke inhalation. Miraculously their only child survived. He is a Mars child whom they adopted. His name is Tim.

I do not like the way Helen looks at me over her coffee. I refuse to return her gaze. Instead, I look at Dawn. She is eating cereal. Rice

Krispies. "Poor Tim," she says. "But he'll be okay — he'll find another home."

He does indeed. Another Greenview family adopts him. The Ellsworths. They live only a few blocks from us. Dawn and he begin seeing each other even more often than before. He spends a great deal of time at our house. It is as though I have a son now, as well as a daughter.

The Greenview Fire Investigator determined that the Halsey fire was caused by a bad gas leak in the cellar, but he has been unable to determine what ignited the gas, since the furnace was out and the Halseys employed solar heat for their hot-water tank.

But people have already lost interest in the Halsey fire because of the many fires that are occurring across the country. The news media seem to have lost track of the fact that many fires constantly occur across the country, or perhaps they are hard put for sensational news. Some of the fires that are occurring involve the homes of people who have adopted Mars children. I do not find this strange, and the media have not remarked on it. After all, with the Mars children scattered throughout the whole country, some of the houses involved are bound to be those they live in. I do not find it strange either that in each such case the Mars child survives and the parents do not. Nor have the media remarked on this. After all, coincidence has a long arm.

But I do not try to convince Helen of this. She has grown paranoid. "You've got to do something," she keeps telling me. "You've got to *do* something!"

"About what?" I ask.

I am finding it difficult to sleep. I keep finding myself wide awake, staring into the darkness. It is as though I have grown old and am afflicted with nocturnal myoclonus, but I can detect no jerking in my legs. Sometimes the darkness into which I am staring becomes the darkness of our backyard at night, and I can make out two figures by the darker hedge, looking at the house. If I keep staring long enough, the figures disappear and the darkness becomes, for a while, the darkness of sleep.

It is noted by the media that many of the fires throughout the country are caused by peculiar gas leaks and by faulty electrical wiring.

There is another fire in Greenview. The charred remains of a man and his wife are found in the debris. Their only child, a Mars adoptee, escaped the flames.

One Saturday afternoon while Helen is shopping and Dawn is attending a high school football game, I go through every corner of Dawn's

room. I go through her desk and through her closet. I search her vanity and bureau drawers. I do not know what I am looking for. Perhaps if I found it I would not recognize it. I am sure it does not exist anyway. She is a sweet, simple Americanized girl. I find nothing.

One evening, when Dawn is out with Tim, Miss Laucello knocks on our door. Helen invites her into the living room and asks her to sit down. She comes straight to the point. "I want Dawn's short story back, Mrs. Fairfield."

"Did Dawn write a short story?" I ask.

"Please, Herb," Helen says.

"I hate calling on you like this and asking for it, Mrs. Fairfield, but I expected you to return it, and when you didn't, I —"

"Why do you want it back, Miss Laucello?" I ask.

"So I can give it back to her after I announce the winners of the contest. Otherwise she'll wonder what became of it."

"I thought maybe it was because she won the contest."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Fairfield, but she didn't."

"I thought it was a good story. But we're talking in circles. What's the real reason you want it back, Miss Laucello?"

Miss Laucello swallows. She is young and very thin, and has large, wide-apart brown eyes. "In — in view of what it says and in view of all the recent fires, I — I thought that —"

"Miss Laucello, if there were any connection between the fires and the Mars kids, don't you think the fire investigators would have made it by this time?"

"They would have if they'd read the story," Helen says coldly.

"Well they haven't read it and they're not going to!"

"It's not that I really believe there's a connection either, Mr. Fairfield," Miss Laucello says. "But I can't help feeling that what your daughter wrote should be made available to the police."

I get to my feet. "The Mars kids aren't pyromaniacs! Do you think the Centers would have farmed them out to the American people if they were? If there'd been anything wrong with them whatsoever?"

"But they may have fooled the people at the Centers, Mr. Fairfield. They may be far more intelligent than they let on. We really know next to nothing about them."

"You'll be telling me next that after they burn everybody out of house and home they plan to take over the country!"

Miss Laucello shakes her head. "No. If that were true, it wouldn't be so bad. But they're only kids, and if they are setting the fires they're only doing it for fun."

"Are you implying my daughter would burn down a house just for fun?"

"Herb, she's not implying anything," Helen says. "She's concerned, is all. And so am I."

"Well there's no reason to be concerned!" I shout. "This country has been having housefires ever since the first settlers began building houses. It's a natural phenomenon. And nobody's going to tell me that the Mars kids are responsible for those we're having now. And if you go around traducing my daughter, Miss Laucello, you'll find yourself on the bad end of a slander suit!"

Miss Laucello departs.

Helen has stopped speaking to me. Good. I now have more time to talk to my darling daughter.

If she has noticed Helen's silence she gives no sign. We go to a spectacular one night. It is about the fire bombing of Dresden. All special effects, of course, but special effects have become such a consummate art that it is impossible any more to distinguish between them and reality.

Afterward, Dawn and I stop for ice cream. She has a big chocolate sundae. I settle for a float. "Did you like the spectacular?" I ask.

"So-so," she says.

The next day there is a fire in school. They discover it in time, and little damage is done. Faulty electrical wiring.

There is a fire in Poughkeepsie. It demolishes two blocks. There are half a hundred casualties. One of the houses was that of the parents of a Mars child. They are listed among the dead. The Mars child escaped.

I search Dawn's room again. Again I find nothing.

Finally Helen breaks her silence. "If you don't do something, I will!"

She goes to the Greenview Fire Chief. When she comes home she is crying. "He didn't believe a word I said!"

One night when Dawn and Tim go to a school dance I wait up for her. When I hear them climb the front porch steps I go to one of the living-room windows. I can see them through it sideways. They are standing on the porch, talking. No, not talking. Giggling. They are holding hands, but they do not kiss.

I manage to get back to my chair before the 3V before Dawn comes in. "Hi, Dad," she says. "Mom in bed?"

"She went up early."

She yawns. "Guess I'd better go too."

She kisses me good night and climbs the stairs.

I turn and toss beneath the covers. Sleep keeps coming and then fading away. What were they giggling about? I lie there in our bedroom,

listening. Dawn's room is across the hall. I hear the whisper of a footstep on the hall rug. Today there was a fire in Syracuse. It was not as bad as the Poughkeepsie fire. Only one block went this time. Listed among the dead were the parents of another Mars child. I turned the newscast off before further mention was made of the Mars child.

Yes. The whisper of a footstep. I am out of bed now, slipping into my bathrobe. My feet find slippers in the darkness. A faint *click* comes from the hall. Then a second *click*. More footfalls. The sound comes from the stairs now. I step into the hall. The upstairs smoke alarm is on the wall next to the door to Dawn's room. I wait till the whisper of footfalls fades away, then remove the cover, masking the click with pressure from my hands. The battery is gone.

I start down the stairs. The light from a streetlight makes pale rectangles of the living-room windows but only slightly alleviates the darkness. A vague shape is moving across the room. The faint light from the windows lends it a silvery cast. It pauses beside the dining-room archway, seems to attenuate as it stretches upward toward the downstairs smoke alarm. There are two *clicks* as the cover is removed and replaced, and the shape slips into the dining room. I descend the rest of the stairs and cross the living room. I do not bother to check the alarm; I know the battery is gone. I enter the dining room. There is no one there. I cross it and enter the kitchen. The basement door is open. I remove a knife from the knife rack. Its blade is long and cruel. I descend the basement stairs.

The shape is no longer silvery. It is a darker blur in the darkness. It is reaching up between the joists. It is giggling.

Laughing before the deed is done.

I advance upon it in the darkness. I seize its slender wrist. The object the little hand was attaching to the gas pipe falls free. I catch it. My fingers tell me it is a tiny vial with a little cylinder attached. After the acid seeping from the vial ate through the pipe, the batteries in the cylinder would have ignited the escaping gas. Tim probably made it. It could easily have been carried in a bookbag.

Fingernails claw into my cheeks. I do not feel the pain. The negligee I paid a small fortune for accentuates the softness of my darling daughter's body. How such primitive attire must have affronted her civilized flesh! I can smell the expensive perfume Helen bought for her. How its crude scent must have insulted her civilized nostrils!

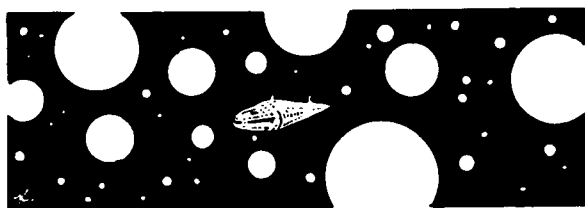
You did not have to go all the way back to the Neanderthalers, my dear. You had only to go back to Columbus and the simple-minded savages he found. You did not even have to go back that far. You had only to go back to the African slaves. Old civilizations and new. The one must always condemn the other. Laughingly you would have murdered us in our beds. I am crying as I plunge the long, cruel blade into my darling daughter's chest.

## THE TRAVELER

*Now I live here in our village,  
On our island in the sea,  
Where the people think our village  
Is the only place to be.  
“All the world,” they say, “is water.”  
And “The world,” they say, “is sky.”  
And: “God put me in our village,  
Though I sometimes wonder why.  
For it’s wide and weird and frightful,  
Stretched from sea to shiny sea;  
It’s not narrow, it’s not cozy,  
It’s not really right for me.  
There’s the strangers on the east side,  
That you wouldn’t want to meet,  
And they dine on human marrow,  
Just across the village street.  
My own block’s okay by daylight,  
But it’s different after dark,  
With the things that lurk in shadows,  
By the big trees in the park.”  
And: “Son, walk around our village,  
Once at least, before you die.  
It’s a long way out to Farside,  
But you’ll make it if you try.  
Try to get home before dinner,  
Tired and worn though you may be,  
When you’ve hiked around our village,  
Made the circuit of the sea.  
For the world, you know, is water,  
And the world, you know, is sky,  
And the rest is just our village.  
You should see it ’fore you die.”  
So they talk, here in our village,  
And I hear them every day;  
But I went once to the shoreline,  
On the lip of Village Bay.  
Then I looked across the water,  
And I saw a sudden spark,*

*Where another wide, weird village,  
Fed its cook-fires in the dark.  
And beyond that lay another,  
And beyond, a hundred more;  
And my cupped ear caught the singing,  
Of the sirens 'round our shore.  
I can't tell them in our village,  
What they know to be absurd,  
But they listen to my singing  
Of the siren songs I heard.*

— Gene Wolfe



## TO MELVILLE

Light is the soul of a star,  
The Shadow of God.  
What then is darkness, is night?  
Is not that black in its way bright?

How bright the midnight wave!  
The breath of God?  
No. But of the angel of this earth,  
Coleridge-caught between the Pole and Perth.

His wings are streaming cloud.  
His feet have trod  
The paths of Luck, his leman.  
Her wails whales; his semen, seamen.

— Gene Wolfe



# MS. FOUND IN A CRUET SET

by Sharon N. Farber

art: Alex Schomburg



*A regular contributor, Sharon Farber has also been treating us to a continuing saga of medical education in St. Louis: internship as we write this, residency to follow.*

*She is a native San Franciscan and misses Bay Area science-fiction fandom keenly. But if she then finds new readers for the genre, is that not for the best?*

Throughout my long association with Mr. Sherlock Holmes, there have been many adventures for which I have deemed the world not ready, either because the tale might compromise innocents, or because the revelations therein would be foreign to a wholesome audience, or simply because it might present an unfavorable portrait of my friend the consulting detective.

I have placed the majority of these memoirs in my battered tin dispatch box. However, the old box being now quite full, I am forced to leave my manuscripts in less obvious places. These pages, which illumine Holmes in a less than optimal light, I am secreting in a cardboard case containing a cruet set painted with scenes of Brighton. I am confident that the box shall not be opened until the world is a meaner place, unconcerned with taste or genteel behaviour. At such a time the world should be ready for my tale.

In *The Sign of Four* I wrote that Holmes partook of cocaine and morphine. The first medicine is easily understood. Holmes was a victim of that particularly English affliction, melancholy. When not involved in a case, he could often be found seated for days upon a pile of cushions, neither eating nor sleeping, his pipe burning aimlessly beside him; a prisoner of thoughts so terrible they could scarcely be reflected in the bleak expression on his haggard face.

At such times I fully countenanced subcutaneous injection of a 7% cocaine solution. The drug gave him the energy to read, to dabble with his chemicals, to speak in more than a monotone. If a case were to materialise he was safe; otherwise he would slide back into a melancholy made worse by the drug's depressive aftermath, so that I at times feared for his life.

The alert reader will have noticed that, while I have more than once described Holmes under the influence of cocaine, I have never shewn him after injection of the opiate. It is not from concern for the detective's reputation that I have neglected to recount such adventures. Rather, while Holmes was morphinized, adventure was impossible.

It was a cold autumn day, the city having been for some time under the grip of a murky brown fog. I came in to breakfast late. Holmes was already in his wicker chair, facing the fire.

Perusing the morning newspaper, I cried, "Holmes, have you seen this? A young coloratura has disappeared from her dressing room in the Paris Opera House." My friend had been slipping into one of his depressions, and I hoped a good case would bring him round. Besides, though on the whole a misogynist, Holmes was fond of opera singers.

"The gendarmerie are blaming someone called *Le Fantôme*. Shall I pack for Paris?" Receiving no reply, I looked round. Holmes was slumped in his chair as if devoid of bones, his eyes glittering. "What is it this time, Holmes — cocaine or morphine?" He gave a sound midway between a sob and a giggle. "Morphine," I sighed.

The detective smiled. "Women," said he. "Always in trouble. Always trouble. Winning things. Poison their children for the insurance," and he

burst into hysterical laughter.

I cursed. I had been, after all, a soldier, and mustering out does not immediately relieve us of our hard-earned military skills. I was interrupted by the entrance of our landlady, Mrs. Hudson.

"Dr. Watson, there's a delegation from Whitechapel in my foyer."

"What!"

"Says they represent the honest folk there. Want to ask Mr. Holmes to find Spring Heeled Jack." Noticing Holmes, she stopped, a look of distaste on her face. While no one was kinder or more helpful during Holmes's melancholies, she lacked patience with drug holidays. I attributed this to memories of her late husband, an alcoholic brute. "Well, he won't be much good to them," she sniffed.

"I fear you're right, Mrs. Hudson. Tell the gentlemen that Holmes is already engaged and cannot accept the case." She exited rather loudly. At the sound of the door, Holmes looked about, mouth and eyes wide as a curious child's.

Sighing, I slit open a letter. As usual, the morning post included requests for aid, some absurd. The old Earl of Blandings wished us to again locate his errant heir. I answered that the young lord was probably, as in our previous encounter, to be found at some agricultural exhibition, observing the pigs.

Next was a plea from a Professor Doktor Van Helsing, requesting our help in locating a number of coffin-sized boxes of imported dirt belonging to a visiting Transylvanian noble. Noting that the return address was Seward's Asylum, I wrote instead to ask Dr. Seward that he not allow his lunatics postal privileges. I almost asked the alienist for advice on a case of melancholia, but decided against it. My patient was by this time staring into the fireplace, and I was forced to divide my attention between the letters and Holmes, who appeared to be contemplating grabbing a handful of flame.

Mrs. Hudson returned bearing a telegram. "*Holmes, must see you today. Gutman.*" I filled out the return message, saying Holmes was indisposed.

No sooner had Mrs. Hudson left than I heard a cab pull up outside the house. Gazing out the window, I saw a quietly-dressed man waiting on the steps below.

"Come, Holmes, you must vacate the fire." I pulled him to his feet; his legs wobbled and he sank towards the floor. Catching him, I said, "Stop giggling. We can't let you be seen like this — it would destroy your career." I lifted him onto my good shoulder, no mean feat as he was limp as a pile of rags, and carried him to his bed. Closing his door behind me, I straightened my collar as footsteps sounded outside our rooms.

"Come in," I called.

The stranger entered, pausing to cough and clear his throat. Before he could speak I introduced myself and said, "It is a pleasure to meet a Scotland Yard detective who is actually from Scotland, and who has risen from patrolman, not letting past illness limit him to a desk job. But you have been

working far too hard of late."

"Amazing!" the man cried with a deep Scottish accent. "How do ye know all that, Dr. Watson?"

"Quite simple," I replied. "Your suit betrays you as a detective, and your tartan stockings indicate you hail from north of Hadrian's Wall. As to your history: you have flat feet, a sequela to the constable's life. You stand as if your back is stiff, no doubt secondary to having sat long months at a desk. But why would you have paused in your rise in the ranks to shuffle papers? Disease, of course — your slight facial asymmetry suggests a bout of brain fever. And as to the working too hard — man, you clearly have bronchitis and should be home in bed."

"You make it seem so easy. If only we had a few of you on the force," he said, his hoarse voice admiring. "I'm Inspector MacGregor. I want Mr. Holmes's opinion on a daring burglary."

"Mr. Holmes is not expected back until the morrow."

"Then you can help me," the Inspector said, and told me of a robbery during a peer's weekend cricket party. "It must be one of the guests," he concluded, passing me a list.

"That can't be," I answered. "These are all honorable Englishmen — none of them would steal their host's jewels. Why, the amateur cricketer Raffles is Holmes's own cousin!"

I rose. "Mark my words, Inspector, this is an inside job. If I were you, I should investigate the butler."

He thanked me gratefully, passing Mrs. Hudson and my next visitors as he left.

Announcing "Mr. and Mrs. Darling and friend," the landlady handed me another telegram. Mr. Darling shook hands gravely; he was a sturdy, embarrassed fellow with a bristling mustache. His wife clutched a tear-sodden handkerchief and barely acknowledged my greeting. The final member of the family group was a huge St. Bernard bitch, wearing the most lugubrious expression of the three.

The telegram read "*Boat leaves for Istanbul at five. Must see you now. Regarding The Black Bird. Gutman.*" I swiftly wrote out regrets that we should not have the pleasure of meeting, and turned to the Darlings. I heard their story leaning back, fingertips apposed, watching the play of suppressed guilt, anger and worry on the man's face.

"To summarize," I said when he had finished, "your children — Wendy, Peter and John — disappeared from a locked upstairs bedroom."

"Leaving sparkling dust all over," the mother piped in.

I stood. "And no wonder they left, the way you've been treating them." Darling began to rise, but I stopped him with a peremptory gesture. "As to the locked room, there is nothing supernatural there. I can think of a dozen ways an enterprising child might have escaped. No doubt you shall find them in a friend's cellar, or run away to a carnival."

Hearing the woman sob, I softened my voice. "However, I can appreciate your concern. There are other detectives available to track down your children — Hewitt, or Dorrington and Hicks, or if you prefer amateurs, there's young Thorndyke. Sharp fellow, but tends to neglect his practice."

Having shewn them out, I looked in on Holmes. He lay flat in bed, one arm hanging over the edge, a subtle grin on his face.

"Are you asleep?" I whispered.

He half-opened his eyes. "Oysters," he babbled. "They shall take over the world. Bury us under shells."

"Don't worry, we're miles from the ocean." I heard feet pounding up the seventeen stairs. Our door flew open just as I closed off Holmes's bedroom. A man barely twenty years old stood glaring at me. He was excessively thin, but his full lips and hooded eyes hinted at a self-indulgence that might someday flesh him out.

"I am Caspar Gutman. Where is Holmes?"

"He is not available for consultation today," I said. "I'm his associate Dr. Watson. May I be of service?"

The young man scowled, then began pacing up and down our Turkish rug, kneading his hands. "The Black Bird may be in London or may have left for Istanbul — I must catch the boat at five. I want Holmes to seek the Bird here . . ." Fists clenched, he stopped before me, shouting, "Where is he?"

My eyes reflexively flicked towards Holmes's bedroom.

"Aha!" Running over, Gutman flung open the door.

My friend lay half-propped up on one elbow, focusing blearily upon us. "Violet?" He began to chuckle, falling back supine in paroxysms of laughter until he suddenly lapsed into snores.

Gutman gazed on him with disgust. He stalked to the door, pausing to snarl, "Detectives! It will be a long time before I consult another of them!"

I turned to the newest *Lancer*; no further visitors arrived to interrupt me. It was teatime when I heard the bedroom door creak open.

Holmes's footfall was unusually heavy. He fell into a chair and downed a cup of tea, then leaned his head on one hand, running the other through his thin hair. Finally he looked out the window, blinking as he tried to focus on the halo of mist about the gas light. The sounds of Baker Street outside were muffled.

"Still foggy, Watson?"

"A quiet day, Holmes," I replied. "You didn't miss a thing." 

# THE SERVANT OF SAIBEL

by Diana L. Paxson

art: Artifact

*Diana L. Paxson has published about a dozen stories over the past several years. Her novels Lady of Light and Lady of Darkness have been published by Timescape.*

*Ms. Paxson is also a poet and illustrator; and she is presently on the staff of Locus, a science-fiction newsletter. She was the founder of the Society for Creative Anachronism. She lives in Berkeley CA, at Greyhaven, a household where even the children have been known to speak forsoothly.*

“Shanna . . .”

The whisper of her name penetrated the normal street noises of Fendor like a dagger point through mail. Shanna’s skin chilled, but she could see nothing wrong. An alley gaped to her left, but her long legs carried her past it, boot heels rapping out an unfaltering rhythm on the cobblestones. The falcon on her shoulder shifted restlessly, sensing the tension her mistress would not show.

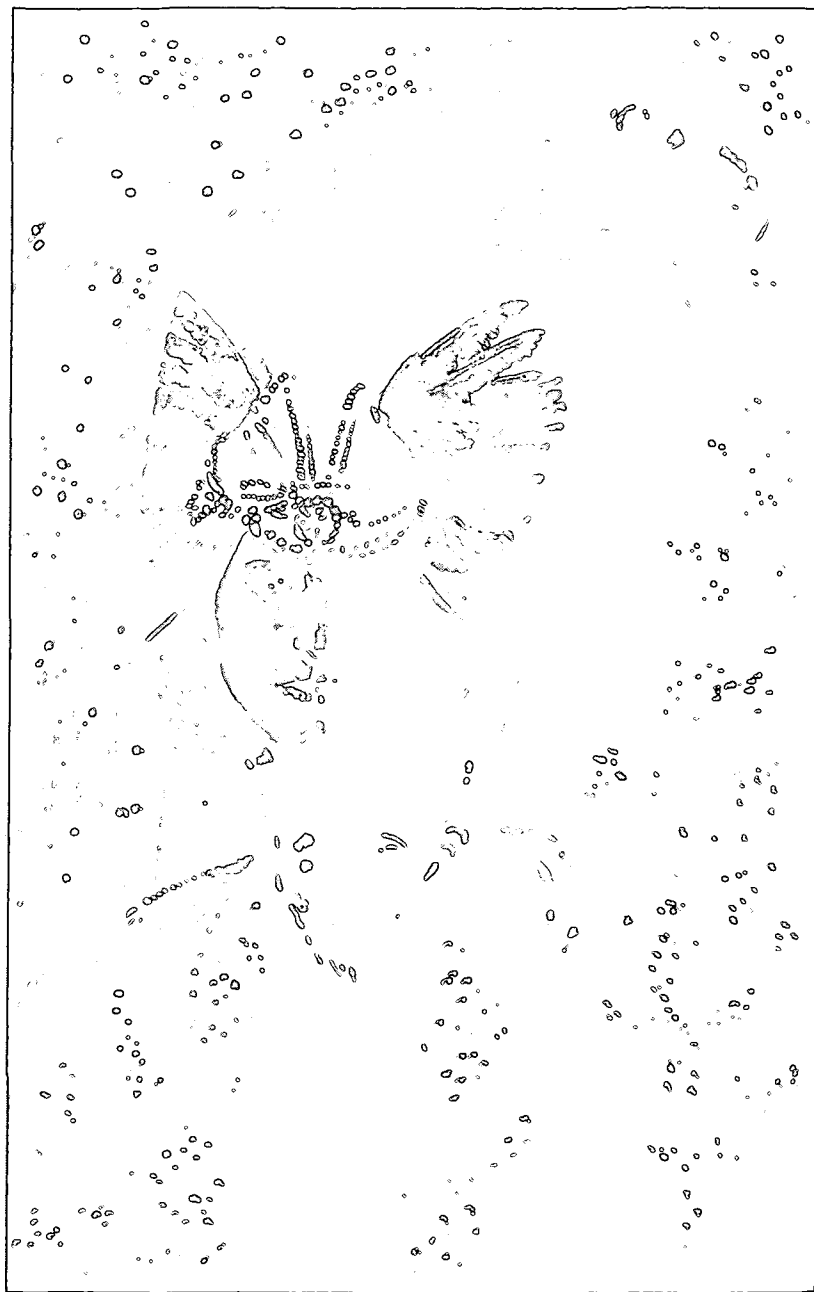
“Peace, Chai!” Shanna lifted a hand to soothe the bird, then tightened the straps of her bulging pack. Perhaps it had been foolish to stop in the city, but the wilderness lay beyond it, and her supplies were low. The Goddess had cursed her already — surely the servants of the Dark Mother would not pursue her now?

The street echoed to the sound of panels being drawn across open shop fronts, and here and there the light of a lantern gleamed on a painted sign, or the worn, exquisite gilding of an earlier age. The citizens of Fendor were hurrying to complete their business before dusk turned to the chill night of early spring. But as Shanna glanced around her they began to edge away with more than the usual surprise at seeing in their streets a woman taller than many men, clad in a quilted hauberk of worn red leather, her black hair capped with steel.

Her hand settled to the hilt of her sword. The scuffle of feet behind her echoed the whisper of her blade as she turned and drew.

Four men were advancing. Behind them others huddled in the alley’s mouth. For a moment they hesitated, as if startled to find that what they had heard about her was true. Shanna frowned at them and took a step forward. Perhaps she could change that surprise to panic now, while they were still unsure.

The biggest of the four growled and shook his club. His mouth was a red slash in his black beard. “Don’t think to frighten us with a blasphem-



mer's blade — *we* are still men, unlike those three you slew, and we are sworn to *Her* service as they were. You destroyed the temple, but the Goddess will destroy you."

From the glint of his eye, Shanna thought that before her destruction took place he meant to prove his manhood on her body, as if that mattered any more. To fulfill her oath to her own goddess she had risked the wrath of the Dark Mother, and she knew that she was barren now. Her belly ached at the memory. She forced away the thought and moved sideways. Her sword was of good Shariteyn steel, but she did not want it shattered parrying a blow from that club.

One of the others darted toward her with dagger raised. She sank in a lunge, extending her sword. Its point rippled along her attacker's arm and into his armpit as his momentum carried him onward. She recovered in a supple movement that brought her upright and drew her sword from the body of the man she had just killed.

She swept the blade around and through the neck of the third man before he realized she was in range. The fourth had backed away and stood a little behind his leader, staring at her like a man whose hearthfire is suddenly devouring his walls.

"Saibel's curse already marks me — be satisfied." She watched them wince as she spoke the forbidden name. "Or else I will destroy *you*, as surely as I burned that temple down."

"You cannot escape." The leader motioned to the alley, and five, a dozen more, stepped over the bodies of their comrades. The street was tight-shuttered against the violence of the deepening night. Only here and there light outlined a windowframe and gleamed on hard faces or the blade of a hunting sword.

Singly they would have been no threat to Shanna, not even the man with the club, but they were too many.

"Does the Prince of Fendor suffer you to murder travellers in his town? Let us see how long it takes for his guards to hear your dying screams!" she said boldly.

"Call then." The bearded man was grinning now. "They will not even know who you were, once we have done."

Unwillingly Shanna stepped back. The men followed her, lust flaring in their eyes. With anger burning against the seeping cold of her fear, Shanna ran.

There was no time to wish she had her mare, stabled securely at the inn — she would have to escape on her own legs this time. Cold air rasped her throat, and after a few turnings the weight of her pack became intolerable. Her boots slipped on the cobbles; she fell against a stone wall with a jolt that jarred her teeth, thrust herself upright and dashed on.

Streets opened before her and her pursuers belled behind her like hounds. She heard laughter and realized that to them this maze was



familiar ground. She paused a moment, gasping, trying to peer through the gloom. Ahead something bulked unevenly against the early stars. As quietly as she could Shanna moved towards it and stumbled against a pillar rough with the lichen-blurred patterns of carven stone.

There was a shout behind her. Shanna turned and shielded her eyes against the torchlight's flare.

"Is this your refuge?" The man with the club laughed. Others were shouldering up behind him, but all Shanna's rage and despair focused on the leader's gross grinning face. One-handed she drew off the falcon's hood, fumbled the jesses free. Chai cried nervously, her sleek head swiveling. Shanna nudged the bird onto her left wrist.

"Chai — kill!" Starting across the broken flagstones, she launched Chai at the head of the black-bearded man as her sword sought his heart. Chai's screams mingled with those of her prey as claws ripped through flesh to bone.

As Shanna's blade brushed his jerkin the ground lurched. She strained to reach him again, but the flagstones on which she stood were tilting beneath her and tipping her into a well of darkness. She had a moment to realize that she must be above some subterranean construction from the elder days. She grasped at nothingness as she fell, then the breath was smacked from her body and the darkness became complete.

"Where is she?" "Is she alive?" "We'll get ropes. . . ."

Shanna's vision cleared slowly. Dancing torchlight modeled the dark forms of the men huddled around the opening above her. She could not move.

"Not down there, as you value your lives!" The bearded leader shoved the others away. "The Goddess has her now!" His voice shook with a horrified glee.

"But what if she gets out?"

Shanna's back and chest screamed as she forced air into her lungs.

"Don't you know what this place is?" said a deeper voice. "These ruins were a temple greater than the one this foreign bitch burned down, and the dungeons are still here. The Guardian is here too. Since the prince forbade our sacrifices it's been hungry. . . ."

Shaking with pain, Shanna struggled to her hands and knees, groping unavailingly for her sword.

"But this hole —" the shadows deepened as the speaker bent over the opening.

"One of the stones gave way, but we can cover it again. The Guardian will not leave this way, and neither will the blasphemer!"

Stone scraped as Shanna tried to gain her feet. The men were overlapping flagstones across the opening. Earth powdered her face and stones clattered around her. She stood and stared up at the shrinking patch of star-sown sky, its darkness a dim glow against the greater blackness that

surrounded her. She heard Chai call and the click of a thrown stone, then a jangle of bells that told her that the falcon had soared free.

"No . . ." Her lips formed the words but no sound came. She could see only one star now, winking mockingly.

"Dark Mother, receive Your sacrifice!" the men cried suddenly. Rock scraped again and the star went out. Shanna heard the stone-muffled murmur of men's voices, the diminishing vibration of their footsteps.

Then there was only silence and the dark.

*She scrambled upward, bruising her fingers on the rough stones. Her chest ached as she squeezed through the crack, but she pressed on until at last she fell into light. . . .*

Still gasping, Shanna woke, savoring relief that it had only been a dream. Then she opened her eyes.

It took her a few moments to realize that she was not waiting for dawn in some wilderness campsite. Here, the dawn would never come, and her nightmare had been kinder than her reality.

She sat up, wincing at the complaint of muscles bruised by her fall. How long ago had that been? Her stomach cramped and she felt for her pack, still securely buckled to her back. At least she had food, and a mournful dripping indicated water near. She fumbled at her side, then around her. She had lost her sword.

*Well, if I want to kill myself my dagger is still here.* She rejected the thought. She had survived so much — how could it end here, like a rat in a hole? "All dungeons have doors . . . somewhere . . .," she said aloud.

After four of the sleeping periods by which Shanna arbitrarily divided the darkness she was no longer so sure. The water was brackish but safe, and sometimes her fingers brushed soft wet things that might be edible once her food ran out. But the passages through which she stumbled only led down. Several times she bumped into the remains of gates, their wood mouldered and their rusting iron warped and scaling now. But there was no door.

Shanna longed for a breath of air that would lead her to the world of light. But here when the air moved it only brought her a concentration of the pervasive rotten-apple scent. Earlier, she had sometimes missed her footing as rats squeaked by, and felt nameless things wriggle away from her hands as she dipped water from some rancid pool. But as she wandered deeper it became more dry and still.

Sometimes she sang, not caring what echoes she woke — epics of Shariteyn, ballads of love she would never know, hymns to Cera and Yraine. But the darkness devoured even the memory of Yraine's holy fire.

Sometimes she thought that vague forms swam before her staring eyes. She sensed presences around her with no perception that people of the sunlight know. But when she found herself trying to talk to them she

fingered her dagger's edge, thinking that perhaps she should kill herself now while she still knew the words to commend her spirit to the gods.

*Determined to allay alarms,  
Psyche lifts her candle high,  
Afraid to see what her white arms  
Through lightless nights have held so nigh.  
The shadows flee before the flame  
Whose radiance, falling from above,  
Gives to her fear a fairer name  
And weds her to the god of love. . . .*

Shanna's foot sent something rattling across the floor and her song died. Stiffly she bent, patting the dust, and snatched her hand away as her fingers closed on a pitted bone. She sat back on her heels, wondering what it had belonged to. Dust swirled and she coughed, stilling suddenly at the familiar sense of a presence near.

"What is it?" she breathed. "Who's there?" Her voice strengthened — a madwoman's voice, she thought. The silence sighed in her ears.

"Something that was once a man. . . ." The voice whispered an echo to her madness. Shanna laughed, knowing it was already too late, and that now it would be a lesser insanity for her to believe that the voice was real.

"I was a woman once!" Her voice broke on the words. "What misfortune brought you here?" she continued quickly.

"I sought the Worm they call the Guardian, the Servant of Saibel. But it found me!" The voice mocked itself. It was a young voice.

"Who are you? Did you kill the Guardian? Do you know the way out?"

"Forgive me —" he said slowly. "You have been here long enough to need to talk. I have been here so long I have forgotten how."

Shanna crawled toward the voice.

"No!" he said sharply. "You must not try to touch me! No woman would want one who has suffered the Worm's embrace!"

She shook her head. "What do I care? The Goddess has taken away my hope of giving any man a child. If you are hurt I will help you."

"No," he said more gently. "I have recovered as well as I ever will. I would rather your touch did not distort the truth of what I used to be."

"What were you then?" She eased back against the hard wall.

"I was Tarik, Prince of Fendor."

"But — why haven't your people rescued you?"

"They think me dead, and it is better so. I could not rule them now!"

"You chose to stay here?" her voice cracked. "But can't you get out?"

Tarik's laughter ruffled the darkness. "We are both trapped here. . . ."

Tears she would not shed constricted Shanna's throat. After a little she reached for her waterbottle. "I have some food . . .," she said reluctantly.

"Food?" his voice held wonder. "I have forgotten what human food is like."

"It is only hard bread and dried stuff — journey fare. . . ."

"I doubt that my stomach could digest such things after so long. You eat it while you can. Soon enough you will be like me. . . ." His voice was oddly distant.

"Where are you? Don't leave me alone!"

"I won't leave you. . . ," his whisper died.

After Shanna had eaten she slept, and when she woke again she felt that Tarik was near. They talked, then and through the changeless days that followed — disembodied voices spinning tales of the legendary world of men.

She learned to picture him as he desired — a warrior in the flower of his strength with russet hair flowing from beneath his gilded helm, and a falcon's head with ruby eyes on the pommel of his sword.

"I had no such beauty," she said then. "My brother Janos used to say I was as lean as a hound bitch. . . ."

"And as graceful as a doe? You have a gracious voice. I see you with skin like pale honey against your dark hair," Tarik replied.

Shanna laughed, thinking what her brother would say to that, and told Tarik how Janos had gone to swear fealty to the Emperor after celebrating his coming of age.

"But he never came back. My father grows old and needs his heir. I swore to find him," she finished simply.

It could have gone on like that until the darkness gave way wholly to dreams. But on the day Shanna's fingers felt the bottom of her pack through the diminishing store of food the dreams all fled.

"Now you must teach me to eat whatever has kept you alive so long." Her voice was brittle. There was a long silence.

"Let me go with you, I must learn — Tarik!"

There was no answer. Not then, and not as the hours crept on. Shanna waited, not daring to touch the food she had left, until the darkness swirled around her and sang in her ears. Then she began to talk again, to herself, to the priestess of the Dark Mother who had died in the temple fire, to Tarik . . .

And finally he answered her.

"Tarik?" On the edge of sound she heard his reply. "I was so afraid. I thought I was going to die alone in the dark. I know how to face death in battle, but not this. Please take my hand, Tarik — I need to know you're really there."

"I can't!"

"Why not? Are you a leper? Is that what you've been hiding from me? I don't care, Tarik. You're human, and I love you. Can't you at least touch

my hand?"

"I'll try . . .," came his whisper at last.

She stretched out her hand, and after a moment felt a feather touch that firmed until a swordsman's hand, narrow-palmed and calloused still, was gripping hers.

"Tarik . . .," she breathed his name. Then her strength left her and she let her hand drop back onto her breast.

"Would you really rather die in battle?" he asked after a little while.

"You were a warrior — wouldn't you?"

His voice was very still. "There may be a way out . . . but the Worm — the Guardian — is blocking it."

Shanna struggled to sit up. "Can the thing be killed?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, I certainly thought so when I swore not to rest until it was destroyed." Tarik's voice held the memory of laughter. "But it crushed my torch, and I couldn't see in the dark . . ."

"I can't see in the dark," she whispered, suddenly afraid.

"I can, now," he replied.

"I lost my sword."

"You can have mine."

When she had eaten and recovered some of her strength, he told her how to find the sword. With his voice to guide her she moved forward, patting the dust until her hand closed on the cold wrought hilt of the blade. Her fingers lingered on the carven pommel, tracing the falcon head with its invisible ruby eyes, before she slid it into her empty sheath.

Then they went on, Tarik's voice always a little ahead of her, warning of fallen stones and turnings in the rising path.

He did not need to warn her when the Guardian came.

It moved with a stench of rotten apples and a sound like something being sucked into a cesspool. The bubble of its breathing echoed in the passageway.

Tarik had told her how legend said the thing was made, in the days when the priestesses still knew how to use their power. It had started as a little limp and pallid thing that left slimy trails beside the hidden pools. But the priestesses had chanted over it, and fed it, and it had grown, sheathing its vulnerability in yards of skinless, blubbery flesh.

It was still growing, seeking its accustomed meat, seeking Shanna's warm and breathing flesh. The sword wavered in her grasp.

"Stand!" Tarik's angry voice hissed in her ear.

"Tarik — it's too close, get back!"

"You have to destroy the sensors on its head. Step forward, to the right, and raise the sword, now — *strike!*"

His voice willed her forward. The sword sliced into something like

runny cheese. With an effort she guided it downward until it bit through a harder core. Her clenched hand touched something cold and slimy and she leaped back, almost letting go of the sword.

"Shanna! You've nearly won! It can't seek you now — but you must edge alongside it and pierce its heart before it can crush you against the wall."

With a fragile obedience she moved sideways, flinching from that slick unnatural flesh.

"Now, grip the sword two-handed and plunge it straight in. . . ."

Shanna straightened the sword and screamed, sensing that monstrous bulk heaving toward her. But she held the blade steady even as it engulfed her, smashing her against the wall, and its own weight drove the blade further in.

The worm stiffened. The quiver that had shaken it when her sword touched its heart grew to a convulsion that battered Shanna against the stones. And still she held fast, until it rolled away again and twitched its way to stillness at last.

Shanna lay against the wall, feeling the creature's slime cold on her body, smelling it.

"Tarik, are you all right?" she whispered after a little while.

"I was not harmed. . . . You have won, Shanna. This is the way to the door." He sounded sad, but she could not wonder about it now.

She stumbled towards him, shivering uncontrollably until she had left the monster behind. Then she fell to her knees in the passageway and retched out the meager contents of her stomach on the floor.

They did not speak much as they approached the gate. Shanna's strength was only sufficient to move one leg before the other, and she scarcely knew the moment when the darkness began to give way. It was only when her eyes throbbed and she realized that she had stepped over a ridge of stone that Tarik had not told her to avoid that her brain recognized what her senses were perceiving, and she saw.

Calling to him, she stumbled forward, shielding her eyes against the thing she most desired, and collapsing at last into a blaze of glory so great that it burned through her closed eyelids and she fell into light.

"No — it's a woman," someone was saying, "she only has man's gear on. . . ."

"But what's this stuff all over her? How did she get into the Maze, and if she met the Guardian, how did she come out alive?" The second voice was younger, a boy's.

Shanna moaned and tried to open her eyes.

"Well she's got a sword — maybe —"

"Mother of Mercies, look at the pommel! It's the falcon of Fendor!" The third voice sounded the oldest. But none of them was the friendly,

mocking voice that Shanna was listening for.

"Tarik . . . Tarik, help me. . . ."

All three pairs of hands let go of her at once. She struggled to sit up and open her eyes, shielding them against the intolerable glare. Three men in the linen tunics and leather breeches of peasants were staring at her in horror. Beyond them plowed fields lay brown and placid in the light of the morning sun.

Shanna turned to the ruins where the door to the underworld gaped like an empty mouth.

"Tarik . . .," she said again. "Why didn't he come out?"

"Do you mean Tarik of Fendor?" The old man's voice was made brittle by something more than age. The other two signed themselves.

Shanna nodded. "He was with me, in there . . ."

The old man shook his head. "Prince Tarik went in that door to slay the Worm of Saibel over two hundred years ago."

They had been very kind. Prince Danier, who reigned now on the throne that Tarik had so briefly filled, had welcomed Shanna with apologies and awe, offered her food and the freedom of his wives' marble bath, made his tailors fashion her new garments of red leather, and recovered her mare Calur and even the errant falcon Chai.

But now she faced the door to darkness again, while behind her waited at a safe distance the Prince and his trembling guards.

Shanna stepped forward, wondering if her hope was indeed only the aftermath of madness, and flinched, scenting the rotten apple stench of the worm.

"Tarik . . .," she called softly, walking steadily down the passageway until she could no longer see the light. Her senses quested outward, fumbling for a presence that had been as familiar as her own soul.

"Shanna?"

Her nails bit into her palms, for the whisper had sounded in her ear.

"Why didn't you come with me?" She willed her voice to steadiness again.

"You are free now, Shanna, but what remains of me is still bound here." His voice was very gentle.

"But you touched me. . . ." She felt as she had when she was a child and a favorite toy horse came to pieces in her hands. She realized now that she had still hoped, despite two hundred years and the entry in the Fendor chronicles, that he retained a breathing body that she could love.

"Yes," he said softly, "but I drew the substance from you. And I loved you, Shanna. I wanted to keep you here. I was going to let you starve, but I could not bear to watch your pain. So I had to let you chance a warrior's death, though I knew that your victory would be a loss for me."

"Tarik, if you had asked me then, I might have chosen to stay . . ."

"Go out into the world, Shanna — you don't belong here." His voice held a hint of his old humor.

"More than anything else I wanted the light," Shanna said slowly. "What do you want, Tarik?"

"Want?" he sounded bewildered. "The Servant of Saibel is dead." He stopped, but she felt some new emotion filling the darkness. "I want clean earth to cradle my bones."

The men that Prince Danier sent to bear his ancestor to his final rest went with torches and priests whose censers fought the lingering scent of the worm. When they reached the immense carcass, Shanna thought that light would only have increased their fear, but the men laughed and made ribald jokes about the thing a city had feared, only now truly believing it slain.

When they came to the scattered bones for which they were searching they were silent again, gathering them reverently and wrapping them in white silk before laying them in the chest of cedarwood. Shanna stood with her back turned until they were done, visualizing the figure of the laughing warrior whom Tarik had taught her to see.

And later, when they had borne him to the burial ground of the princes of Fendor, she watched like an image while the priests lowered the casket into the ground and spoke the words to set a captive spirit at liberty.

Then the others turned away. But still Shanna stood, bound to Tarik as he had been bound to the Worm of Saibel. A little wandering breeze stirred the leaves of the willow tree and lifted the damp hair from her brow.

She sighed, and stiffened as she felt upon her mouth the pressure of firm lips for a moment that seemed as long as one of her days underground. The air held a whisper of familiar laughter.

And then he was gone. She saw wind bend the wild lilies by the grave and ripple like silk across the field.

"Tarik . . . goodbye . . ." Shanna smiled, knowing that now they both were free.





# THE LADY WHO RODE THE CENTRAL LINE

by Tina Rath

art: Val Lakey Lindahn



*Tina Rath, a graduate of London University, works for the Engineering Industry Training Board of Great Britain, and most of her published writing has been about foundry training, but she has sold some fantasies to British and American publications. She is studying for a Master's degree in Theatre Studies and hopes to write her thesis on the Theatrical Vampire, so combining, at any rate, two of her interests.*

"I saw Lenin on the subway today," said Mrs Paggledon casually.

Her daughter-in-law, Helen, who was sprinkling oregano on the bolognese sauce, let her hand slip. 'Very savoury,' her husband was to say later, picking dry greenery from between his teeth, 'but a bit — Italian.' Then she collected herself and remembered what the psychiatrist had said about not arguing.

"You see, once you argue you accept her fantasies. You give them a basis in reality. You know, and I know, that she can't have met — who was it?"

"Well, it's quite a lot of people," Helen had said apologetically, though she did not know what she had to apologise for, really. "It's usually Russians. Dead Russians, like Tolstoy or Trotsky, and sometimes Stalin, but they can be English. She saw William Morris once in the laundrette." Helen did not add that it was William Morris who had really rung the alarm bells for her husband Herbert. No expert on foreign affairs — for all he knew Trotsky was alive and well and taking his vodka with ice — but even he realised that the famous wall-paper manufacturer of Victorian times must be dead.

"Is, er, socialism a common factor?" the psychiatrist asked.

"It could be," Helen agreed, doubtfully.

"And, er, death?"

"Death?"

"I mean, all the personalities your mother-in-law claims to encounter are in fact dead. She never sees current leaders of the Sino-Soviet bloc? Or, for instance, the Queen Mother? Many of my patients see members of the Royal family."

But Helen had to admit that her mother-in-law never did see members of the Royal family in the subway. Or if she did she had not found them worth mentioning.

"So," he tapped his front teeth with his pen. It was a very cheap plastic Biro, and Helen wondered why a professional man like that did not buy himself a nice gold-mounted fountain pen. "So. We have two common factors. Socialism and death. Interesting. I should like to meet your mother-in-law. It is, of course, easier to treat a patient one has actually met.

"I'm afraid that's out of the question," said Helen, firmly. "We really hoped you'd be able to suggest some way of dealing with it . . ." what she had really hoped was that he would say these things were quite normal at Mrs Paggledon's age and easily cured. Some sort of capsule, three times a day, was what she would have liked.

"I see. Well, it all comes down to the point I made earlier. To argue is to accept. You know — if she said, for the sake of an example — that she met a neighbor in the street you might say 'Oh no, she's gone to her sister's, you couldn't have seen Mrs Brown today,' but that accepts the possibility of her at some time and in some place meeting Mrs Brown."

"But what should I say?" Helen demanded, coming as close to snapping as she dared, "If I say, 'Oh really; and was he looking well?' every time she says she's met a dead Russian on the Central Line, it's surely encouraging her even more."

"Well, do as you would when your daughter tells you about her imaginary friends, or pets —"

"Do you mean it's hereditary?" Helen said, horrified. "Do you mean Anthea will start seeing things?"

"Good heavens, no. In a child of that age it's perfectly normal. Most of them have an invisible friend or pet. My own daughter had one called Bunnikins. She used to get most upset in supermarkets if shoppers trod on him without realising, and of course, as they couldn't see him it happened quite often. My wife had to stop taking her shopping in the end."

Helen cut through this cosy reminiscence. "Anthea hasn't got anything like that." She spoke boldly but she felt uneasy. Perhaps this wasn't normal. After all, if a psychiatrist's daughter went about with invisible rabbits, it must be all right.

"Oh. Well, if she had, you might say when she talked about them, 'That's nice, dear' or an equivalent and just go on with what you were doing. Not make a big *thing* out of it."

"That's nice, dear," Helen repeated with all the false conviction of a television commercial.

"Yes," the psychiatrist agreed doubtfully, "or an equivalent. But whatever you do, don't argue with her."

So: "That's nice," said Helen to her mother-in-law, and went on trying to fish bits of oregano out of the sauce with a tea-spoon.

"There's no need to take that tone," said Mrs Paggledon, bridling. "I know you don't believe me . . ."

"I didn't say that," said Helen, helplessly.

"You implied it. Your tone implied it. Oh, it was Lenin all right. Vladimir Ilyich, I called, and he turned round without thinking."

"Did any one else in the car turn round?" Helen asked before she realised that she had been trapped into arguing again, and so accepting the fantasy.

"Oh, everyone turned round. But he looked startled. Guilty. He got off at the next stop, so he knew I'd recognised him," she finished triumphantly.

Helen gave up with the oregano and tried to change the subject.

"Shall we have a cup of tea before Herbert comes in?" she asked cosily.

"I'll have some tea if you're making it. But I shall take mine in a glass with my special holder and no milk, if you please." She left the kitchen.

Helen sighed. The Russian influence was getting stronger. Very probably her mother-in-law wouldn't want spaghetti bolognaise for dinner at all. What did they eat in Russia? Goulash? Or was that Hungary? Wearily she loaded the tray and took it into the lounge where her daughter sat stolidly

watching the television. Mrs Paggledon had taken up her knitting, and everything looked reassuringly domestic.

But: "I have a theory," said Mrs Paggledon.

"What about, dear?" Helen said, hoping it was knitting patterns. "Not so close to the screen, Anthea, please."

"She needs glasses," said Mrs Paggledon, momentarily distracted.

"The optician says she doesn't," said Helen, unwilling to go over very old ground again, but grateful for any distraction from the subject of Russian ghosts.

"Nonsense," said Mrs Paggledon, "if you don't wear glasses when you need them your eyes get worse and worse. It's well known. I had very weak eyes as a child and I wore glasses until I was seventeen. Then my eyes were completely cured and I have had exceptionally good sight ever since."

Helen only answered with a sigh.

Mrs Paggledon started another row of knitting. "Now, as I was saying, my theory is that the subway's Central Line is a sort of Purgatory for communists. It might even be Hell. They're doomed to ride on and on enduring all the horrors of a nationalised transport system."

Helen had not read Dante, so she did not suggest that the Circle Line might be more suitable. Instead she said, foolishly, "But where do they go at night?"

How cross the psychiatrist would have been! And so would Herbert, who had not paid his exorbitant fees to have his advice ignored so wantonly.

"You don't understand. They're not like you and me, they won't need breakfast or a wash and brushup. I expect they just dematerialise when the subway shuts. Or they could sit on the embankment with all those poor homeless people."

Helen began to feel that this conversation was unsuitable for tender ears. "Why don't you go out and play in the garden, dear?" she asked her daughter.

"What with?" said Anthea, who was watching an Open University broadcast on social engineering.

Helen wondered if she should suggest an invisible friend. Or pet?

"Just run along, dear," she said firmly.

Anthea, a stolid but obedient child, stumped rather than ran out into the garden. Her square little figure could be seen passing and re-passing the window as if pacing a prison exercise yard. Helen sighed again.

"There's no need to send the child outside just because I start talking about my revenants," said her mother-in-law.

"About what? I thought they were Russians, dear."

"They're not always Russians. But they are always revenants. Meaning, dear," she added kindly, "people who have come back. From the dead."

"Ghosts?" Helen gasped.

"Not ghosts in any vulgar sense. Not your Gothic raw-head-and-bloody-

bones. But certainly discarnate entities.”

Helen wondered where her mother-in-law found words like that. She herself had enough trouble with cross-words if the clues went over seven letters.

“But why don’t they haunt their own countries? Or their own homes? I mean, why should William Morris come into the laundrette?”

“I don’t know, I’m sure. He had a big bag of washing with him, that I can tell you. One of those blue plastic things that make all the clothes sweat so that they’re wringing wet when you get them home.”

Helen took a long gulp of tea. Mrs Paggledon continued cheerfully: “I mean, there’s so many people about in the streets and subways and in the laundrettes these days. And some of them look so strange. It stands to reason they can’t all be ordinary people. I reckon there’s a whole lot of revenants about that we don’t even recognise. I mean, it’s obvious.”

“But . . .” said Helen and was silent. There certainly were a lot of strange-looking people around. Only the other day she had seen a girl with orange hair, wearing footless leopard-skin tights with orange socks (they matched her hair), gold plastic sandals, a very short leather skirt and a purple satin waistcoat. It was mid-morning too, so she could hardly have come from a fancy-dress party. And you never saw clothes like that in the shops. So where did they come from? No doubt there was a sensible explanation, but she couldn’t immediately think of one.

“I expect they send you back to a different country once you’re dead so you won’t be recognised. After all, you wouldn’t want to keep bumping into relatives, would you, even if there hadn’t been any unpleasantness over the will. They slipped up with those Russians. Of course, there’s not many people on the Central Line actually taking a course in Russian history, with time to look round. I don’t suppose they bargained for me,” Mrs Paggledon concluded smugly.

Helen scoured her mind for some sort of theological counter to this. “What about Heaven? And the — other place?”

“Heaven is where you find it. Just like Hell being other people, like that Frenchman says. I suppose you might be sent to the South of France if you’d led a good life and that was what you fancied. I’d like to travel, myself. India. Nepal. Tibet. No worry about frontiers, I suppose . . .” she looked dreamy for a moment. “I mean, Helen, have you seen all those young people about now? The ones with spiky hair in funny colours and the really odd clothes?”

Helen, remembering those leopard-skin tights, could only nod.

“Well, I reckon *they’re* from another planet. Still revenants, still dead, in their world, but they’ve never really lived on this world at all. I think there’s a war going on where they come from because they’re all so young, and they look sort of glazed as if they’d been through a lot. And you mostly see them in the subway too, very rarely in the streets. It’s probably something to do

with the light. Revenants have always been sensitive to light."

"How would they get on in the South of France then?" said Helen.

"Dark glasses," returned Mrs Paggledon promptly. "And there's another thing. Think of all those people you see wearing dark glasses, even in the rain, and on the subways. I wonder if they're revenants too."

Anthea stumped into the lounge. "Daddy's home," she announced without rapture.

Helen rose gratefully to her feet to greet her husband with the phrase: "Herbert, I'm very worried about your mother."

"Now you know what the psychiatrist said," Herbert muttered, looking over her shoulder to see if his daughter and mother were within ear-shot. He wished to guard them from that word as carefully as any Victorian paterfamilias protected his women-folk from smuttier terms.

"I can't help it, Herbert, I'm starting to believe her."

Herbert took a deep breath. He shuddered at what that man might charge for treating two women. "We'll talk it over later," he told his wife, soothingly.

Their talk came to no very happy conclusion. Herbert was not going to have any blood relative of his pronounced insane, or 'mental' as he put it to himself, unless and until she committed multiple murder or was caught shop-lifting. They had consulted the psychiatrist under the strictest confidence, and Herbert would not even dream of letting the patient in on the secret. "You know how Mother talks," he had said plaintively. "She'll be telling strangers on the subway."

"She shouted 'Vladimir Ilyich' on the subway today," Helen told him. "Herbert, is that normal?"

"I expect they thought she was swearing," he said hopefully. "You hear a lot of elderly ladies swearing on the subway these days. Look, Mother's just getting a bit eccentric in her old age. You can put up with it, surely. It won't be for long. You know about her heart . . ."

"I don't mind her being eccentric. But she makes it sound so real."

"Now Helen, you know that's nonsense. If Lenin and Trotsky were riding round on the subway, you don't suppose the only person to have noticed it would be one daft — er — silly old woman. There'd be a panic."

Helen began to agree with him. She had a receptive personality. The bolognaise sauce was the result of a radio programme on brighter cooking. She agreed, but she was not happy about it.

Next day she felt even less happy. Mrs Paggledon came in in the middle of the afternoon looking very shaken. She sat down and drank her tea with milk in it without complaint. Then she said: "Helen. They're on to me."

"What?"

"I was sitting in a half-empty carriage and a young man in a fur hat sat

beside me. He leaned towards me and said, very softly: 'You know.' "

"You know what?"

"Just that. Those two words. But of course he meant that I know about the revenants. He was wearing dark glasses, too, by the way. It was my calling out to Lenin yesterday. It put them on their guard. I should have realised."

"Now, Mother, this young man, did he *do* anything strange, I mean was he familiar in any way?" Helen asked nervously. Mrs Paggledon was by no means a glamorous old lady, but you get all sorts of strange people on the subway.

"Why *no*," said Mrs Paggledon, innocently. "I'd never seen him before. I think he's one of the executive, not a true revenant. I suspect he was a psychopomp."

This sounded like psychopath to Helen and she said so.

"No dear. A psychopomp is a conductor of the dead."

Helen visualised an undertaker with a peaked cap and a ticket machine. Mrs Paggledon went on talking. It seemed to soothe her.

"Mercury was a psychopomp. And Anubis, the Egyptian jackal god. Of course the young man could have been Anubis himself. The fur hat could have been jackal fur. It could have been hiding his ears."

Helen sat down.

"They would definitely need some one like that to tell people where to go and to explain the rules, you see."

"Did he say anything else?"

"Yes dear, after a while, and that is what I found so disturbing. He said, 'Have you told any one else?' His tone was quite bloodchilling."

"And what did you say?"

"I lied, of course, my dear. I was thinking of you and Anthea. I said no."

"Thank God for that," said Helen, before she thought. Then she pulled herself together. She remembered what Herbert and that very expensive psychiatrist had said. She forced herself to smile, and say: "Really, Mother, you shouldn't talk to strange men on the subway, you know. Whatever would Herbert say?"

Mrs Paggledon shook her head. "It's all right, my dear. It was wrong of me to try to involve you. It's more dangerous than I realised. If any one ever does ask you, tell them I was a silly old woman who got a bit strange in her old age."

"Mother, do you feel quite well?" Helen demanded, disturbed by this excursion into the past tense.

"I feel perfectly well. But I'm going to die."

"We're all going to die some time, Mother . . ."

"But I am going to die at eight o'clock on Wednesday the fourteenth. He told me. I've been given three days to arrange my affairs, and on the fourteenth he will come to lead me away. I know too much, you see."



"Now look, Mother, you've — you've not been yourself recently. You may have met someone on the subway who was a bit eccentric, a foreigner or something like that, and you, well you got a bit muddled by what he said. That's all."

Mrs Paggledon smiled briefly. "All right, my dear, if it comforts you to think so. Now, I've got a lot to sort out. I think I'll go to my room."

Everyone had told her that it would be a mistake to have her mother-in-law live with them. Helen had laughed. She got on very well with Mrs Paggledon, she would protest, she was such a lively old lady, always out and about. She loved to be on the move. She was out almost every day of the week, doing that mature students' course in Russian history. Why, she'd even just travel round on the subway rather than sit at home and do nothing. She'll keep herself amused, she'll be no trouble, she'll be company for me, especially with Herbert away such a lot on business. And now this.

It was all Herbert's fault of course. It was all due to his greed, to his making his own mother take advantage of the property boom to sell her house (much too big for her now) and come and live with them as a paying guest (we must let her keep her independence). And now Herbert's mother had gone quite spectacularly mad, and Herbert was away on one of his business trips that Helen had always suspected were mixed with more than a little pleasure, and he wouldn't be back until Thursday.

Helen summoned up all her courage and phoned Herbert's hotel. He was not there, but she left a message that he was to come home at once, without even waiting to phone her to ask what was wrong. Then she did what she should perhaps have done first and phoned the doctor.

"I'm sorry to bother you," she said, her voice sounding silly and artificial in her own ears, "but my mother-in-law says she's going to die."

"For heaven's sake," said the receptionist, "it's after six o'clock, you know."

"That's all right," she heard herself say in the same silly voice, "it's actually scheduled for the day after tomorrow, at eight, but perhaps I could get her to change it. What are your surgery hours by the way?"

She dropped the receiver then and began to laugh and cry at once. When the doctor did arrive he found a hysterical young woman being competently looked after by a calm old lady. Explanations, which were involved without being lucid, made no reference to Mrs Paggledon's imminent death. Later that evening Herbert phoned: he said he could not get home even if he wanted to. There was a rail strike and the airport and the motorway had been put out of action by freezing fog. Besides, he felt that whatever the emergency was, Helen was able to cope.

So she settled down to watch her mother-in-law prepare for death. She parcelled out her clothes into bundles marked Charity Shop, Jumble Sale and Dressing Up Box; she tied labels, mostly marked 'Anthea' and 'Helen' to her few small pieces of jewelry; she burned all her letters; tidied her pho-



tograph album; and made a very workmanlike will, leaving most of her capital in trust for Anthea and a substantial bequest to the Tibetan refugees. Herbert was to fight this tooth and nail, but it could not be faulted. Then she had her hair done, and a manicure too — and took a last trip on the Central Line.

She came back mildly excited. This was at six o'clock on the evening of the fourteenth.

"You look very well, Mother," said Helen, firmly.

"I feel much better, dear. I've seen that young man again. I'm sure he *is* Anubis, by the way. He told me that he thinks they can arrange travel for me in India and Tibet. And even other planets later if I want. I've led a rather selfish, useless sort of life, he said. I had a good brain and a capacity for study that I never really started to use until it was too late, and I was unfaithful to poor Herbert's father several times, but that bequest stood in my favour. I'm sorry I had to deprive Anthea of that money, but I was so afraid they'd send me to the Paris metro. Or New York, of course. And he assures me that the — passing will be quite painless."

"Please don't talk like that, Mother."

Mrs Paggledon leaned forward and patted her hand with a surprisingly tender gesture. "Don't worry, my dear. I'm going to have a bath, and then we'll have a nice cup of tea. He should be here soon after that."

Helen whimpered.

"You won't see him, my dear. Not this time. And when he does come for you, he'll be quite welcome. You'll see."

Helen heard her running her bath upstairs. She began to cry, then pulled herself together and filled the kettle. By the time Mrs Paggledon was ready, Helen had laid a tray with the best china and taken it into the lounge. They drank their tea, making awkward conversation about the weather, like strangers in a station waiting room. When they had finished, Mrs Paggledon dabbed her mouth with her handkerchief and said: "That was very nice, my dear. Now if you don't mind I'll go upstairs by myself. It's nearly eight o'clock."

Helen watched her go out of the room, and then sat back in her chair, hands pressed against her eyes, in case she should see, in case she should see what? A man with a jackal's head? An undertaker in a peaked cap? A young man in a Russian-style hat made of grey fur?

It was a long time before she could make herself leave the chair. When she did it was ten past eight. She went upstairs. Mrs Paggledon was lying on her neat bed, in a clean nightdress. She was dead. It had apparently been quite painless.

Helen spent quite a long time under the care of the psychiatrist. After all, he only had her word for what her mother-in-law had told her. Even Herbert

had heard most of it at second hand. It took her some time to realise that they both thought that she had been hallucinating; and when she did, she agreed with them at once. That would be so lovely. She'd had a nervous breakdown, brought on by her mother-in-law dying so suddenly of a heart-attack when she was all alone in the house, Anthea having been providentially sent to stay with a friend that night. And everything that led up to that death had been a delusion. Of course. Of course.

She finished her treatment. She was sitting at home one night quite cured, quite happy, when BBC television showed a documentary on the forbidden city of Lhasa. There was a quick, rather blurred shot of a street in Lhasa, a house in Lhasa, and an old Tibetan woman living in Lhasa. An old Tibetan woman who wore large sun-glasses. And Mrs Paggledon's crisp, old-fashioned, unmistakable hairstyle.

Helen is such a nice girl, such a lovely girl, so unselfish, she'll do anything for you. And she's always so busy. She took her degree, as a mature student, and now she does part-time teaching as well as studying for a postgraduate qualification. But she never neglects her family; and as for her friends — well, you only have to ask. That's what everyone says. Well, perhaps there is one thing she won't do. You must never ask her to travel on the subway.

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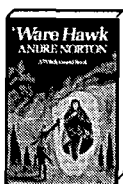
The traveller in time adjusts his toy  
And goes to tea with wise men ages dead;  
He'll plunder bare the treasure-rooms of Troy,  
And coax the fickle Helen to his bed.  
(The fact that he has no linguistic skill  
Will not impede his plans for conquest much;  
Some centuries from now there'll be a pill  
Or box that translates word-for-word, or such.)  
He'll live for any time at all but now  
Until by fluke he manages to kill  
His grandpa, or himself, and reasons how  
Like everyone he knew, he's taking still  
The trip through time the traveller understands  
When first he feels arthritis in his hands.

— John M. Ford

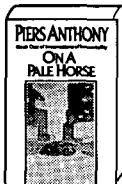
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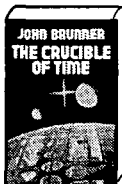
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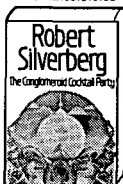
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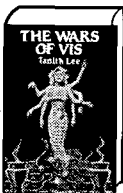
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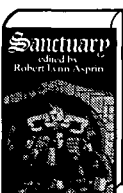
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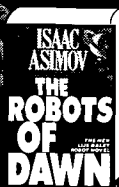
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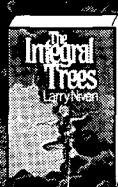
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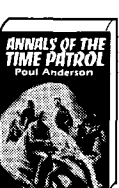
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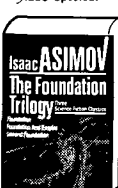
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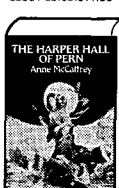
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